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A descriptive case study of appreciative inquiry as an approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school

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A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS AN APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

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by
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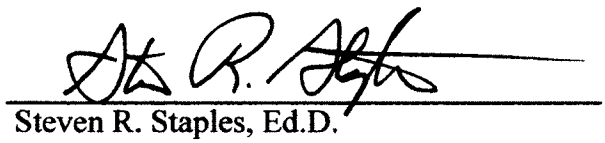
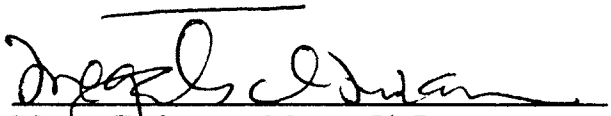
Approved March 27, 2014 by



Steven R. Staples, Ed.D.
Chair of Dissertation Committee



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Dedication

As life is a long journey requiring perseverance and constant growth, so does an academic journey. Arriving at this point of reflection, I realize that my journey has been long and challenging, but well worth the effort. While the price for taking the journey is high, I often question who truly paid the price. It is true that I endured the long hours reading, writing, and reflecting. It is equally true that those closest to me endured hours patiently waiting for me to play a game or be a more attentive husband. To them I am both sorry and appreciative, for without them, I am not sure I would have undertaken the journey, but with them I take it with zeal. Paradoxically, I draw the strength and energy necessary for this journey from my wife and daughters, while at the same time realize that the journey has kept me from those I love.

This dissertation and academic journey is dedicated in honor of the memory of my grandfather, Emanuel Ruhlman. Your powerful words and grounded wisdom framed my future and influenced countless generations to come. To this day, I remember that cool fall evening, where as an impressionable middle school student, I sat listening to you firmly state your desire for the future of our family. You proclaimed, "I would like to see a Ruhlman work with his head rather than his backside." I have carried those words in my heart for some time and thank you for saying them every chance I get. Thank you, for there are few events that have transformed me more swiftly and exposed the path forward as clearly as your profound passion for the improvement of your family.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my daughters Jordan, Emily, and Taylor. Thank you for your support and understanding. Jordan, I will forever remember you as a baby; sitting behind me on the sofa playing with my head as I wrote papers for the master degree. You have become a polite, sweet, and thoughtful young lady and I am proud of you. Emily, I will forever remember you as my hunting buddy, sitting in a duck blind or tree stand. You have become a polite, active, and energetic young lady and I am proud of you. Taylor, my baby, I will forever remember you sitting beside me as I wrote doctorate papers, always demanding attention. Finally, we can go play. I look forward to watching you and your sisters grow in the future years. Once again, thank you.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation and all my efforts to my best friend and wife, Kate. I sincerely thank you for your patience not only with this endeavor but with all my endeavors. It takes a special person to tolerate my faults while continuing to see my strengths. I can only hope that you know the depth of my love and how my heart warms every time I see you upon returning home from an adventure. Moreover, I will apologize now, in advance, for my future endeavors. Kate, I love you and thank you for your support and understanding. Most importantly, thank you for spending your life with me.

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To all my professors at the College of William and Mary for their excellent courses, relevant work, and high standards.

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To the Superintendent of the Wills Mountain School District (pseudonym) for your encouragement and friendship throughout my career with the district and academic journey. To the Board of Education of the Will's Mountain School District (pseudonym) for your supportive vision in allowing me to continue to develop and grow.

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To my wife Kate and daughters Jordan, Emily, and Taylor for your patience and support throughout this journey.

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A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS AN APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

ABSTRACT

This study's purpose was to describe appreciative inquiry (AI) as an approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school. The study investigated four research questions. How do plans for special education emerge as participants engage in the four phases of AI during strategic planning for the future of special education in a public school district? What were participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as a method to develop strategic plans for the future of special education? To what extent did participants' experiences using AI mirror the philosophical principles of AI? To what extent did using AI to develop strategic plans align with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning in the next decade? The study utilized a descriptive mixed method case study approach to collect data through focus groups, artifacts, and surveys from twelve special education subcommittee members as they used AI to develop strategic plans for special education. The study's findings revealed that AI: (a) produced organizational learning, (b) fostered individual and collective analysis, (c) offered the time and space for positive dialogue, (d) promoted strategic thinking, (e) facilitated the creation of a collectively imagined vision and mission, (f) increased subcommittee members' commitment, (g) encouraged collaboration through positive dialogue and a unique positive focus, and (h) offered a logical and inclusive process to develop plans.

The study may offer public school districts a concrete model for strategic planning and educational leaders an approach to change grounded in AI theory and practice.

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A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS AN APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL

Chapter 1: Introduction

Public education is awash in a sea of negativity as educators seek solutions to solve formidable problems. Almost daily, news headlines state that U.S. schools leave some students behind and fail to adequately prepare others to meet the future needs of our country. In response to this omnipresent concern over the performance of public schools, Congress passed *No Child Left Behind* as a way to make public schools more accountable (Fowler, 2009; McGuinn, 2006). Additionally, policymakers opined that market-like approaches commonly found in the private sector would spur improvement in public schools by creating competition and parent choice (Lubienski, Gulosino, & Weitzel, 2009; Scott, 2011). Acting on this belief, governors and state legislatures swiftly enacted charter school legislation creating direct competition between charter schools and public schools for students and essential resources (Holyoke, Henig, Brown, & Lacerino-Paquet, 2009). Then without warning, the recession created huge state budgetary deficits. In response to these large deficits, many governors and states legislatures were forced to make difficult decisions, which for some states involved cutting funds to public education, resulting in the curtailment of viable school programs and the furloughing of dedicated teachers and administrators (Conant, 2010; Young & Fusarelli, 2011). Facing concerns over accountability, competition, and an economic crisis, the future of public education and its public value hangs in the balance.

While public education as a whole struggles to find solutions for seemingly overwhelming issues, special education has struggled extensively for decades to

ameliorate the concerns of stakeholders. The long history of special education is tumultuous with proponents of special education battling constantly for better treatment and opportunities for students with disabilities (Giordano, 2007; Osgood, 2008). Although, federal legislation furthered the cause of students with disabilities, special education continues to be a fertile area for dispute. For example, there are often disputes between school districts and parents over the placement of students with disabilities (Weber, 2001). Moreover, special education is not insulated from many of the same pressures experienced in regular education. The recent passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 is heavily influenced by *No Child Left Behind* and its focus on accountability (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). Consequently, students with disabilities may also choose to leave public education in search of a better experience and individualized education as often advertised by the competitors of public schools.

With the belief that better planning will produce better performance, federal and state governments require public schools to create strategic plans and/or improvement plans (U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2012). Unfortunately, many schools facing enormous and complex issues approach strategic planning as a problem-solving process, and consequently, fail to recognize existing strengths and dreams already kindling in public education (McKenzie, 2003). Furthermore, the language of strategic planning overflows with words such as risks, problems, issues, and gaps that often indicate the presence of deficit thinking, which has the potential to negatively impact participants by producing feelings of helplessness and destroying their commitment (Ryde, 2008). Thus, the overemphasis on problems and

subsequent deficit thinking constrains conversations amongst stakeholders and subtly entraps them in a vicious cycle of proposing tired solutions rather than looking beyond the problems to identify more effective solutions (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011).

Therefore, public schools, inundated with negativity and facing considerable questions about the future and their public value, deserve strategic planning options that capture the potential of public schools and allow the members of the education community to collaborate and develop plans for the future. One particular option is an approach to planning called Appreciative Inquiry (AI). As an approach, Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly (2011) defined AI as:

> Appreciative Inquiry is, essentially, a collaborative and highly participative system approach to seeking, identifying and enhancing the 'life-giving forces' that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic and organizational terms. It is a journey during which profound knowledge of a human system at its moments of wonder is uncovered and used to co-construct the best and highest future of that system (p. 22).

This definition reveals a key characteristic of AI, which holds that organizations have strengths, which are sources of knowledge and energy for developing plans for the future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). AI may also offer public schools an affirmative approach to strategic planning that (a) produces strength-based organizational learning, (b) engages participants in positive dialogue, (c) generates new possibilities, (d) creates positive emotions and energy, (e) fosters commitment, and (f) develops a strategic plan

for the future of the organization (Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

While AI may offer considerable benefits to public schools, it has only recently migrated from other private and public sectors to public education (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Consequently, the research examining the application of AI in public education is sparse requiring additional research (Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). This study endeavors to add to the newly developed research and literature about AI in education, and specifically, will examine the use of AI as an approach to developing strategic plans in special education.

Problem Statement

Public schools inundated with negativity may benefit from exploring alternative approaches to develop strategic plans. Moreover, strategic planning in public education must facilitate the participation of diverse stakeholders (Holcomb, 2009; Rutherford, 2007). AI may offer public schools an alternative approach to strategic planning that: (a) produces strength-based organizational learning, (b) engages participants in positive dialogue, (c) generates new possibilities, (d) creates positive emotions and energy, (e) fosters commitment, and (f) develops a plan for the future of the organization (Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). This study examined AI employed by a subcommittee on special education to create strategic plans for special education in a public school. Additionally, this study examined participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as an approach to strategic planning. Finally, this study used Bryson's

(2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning to analyze AI's capacity as a strategic planning process.

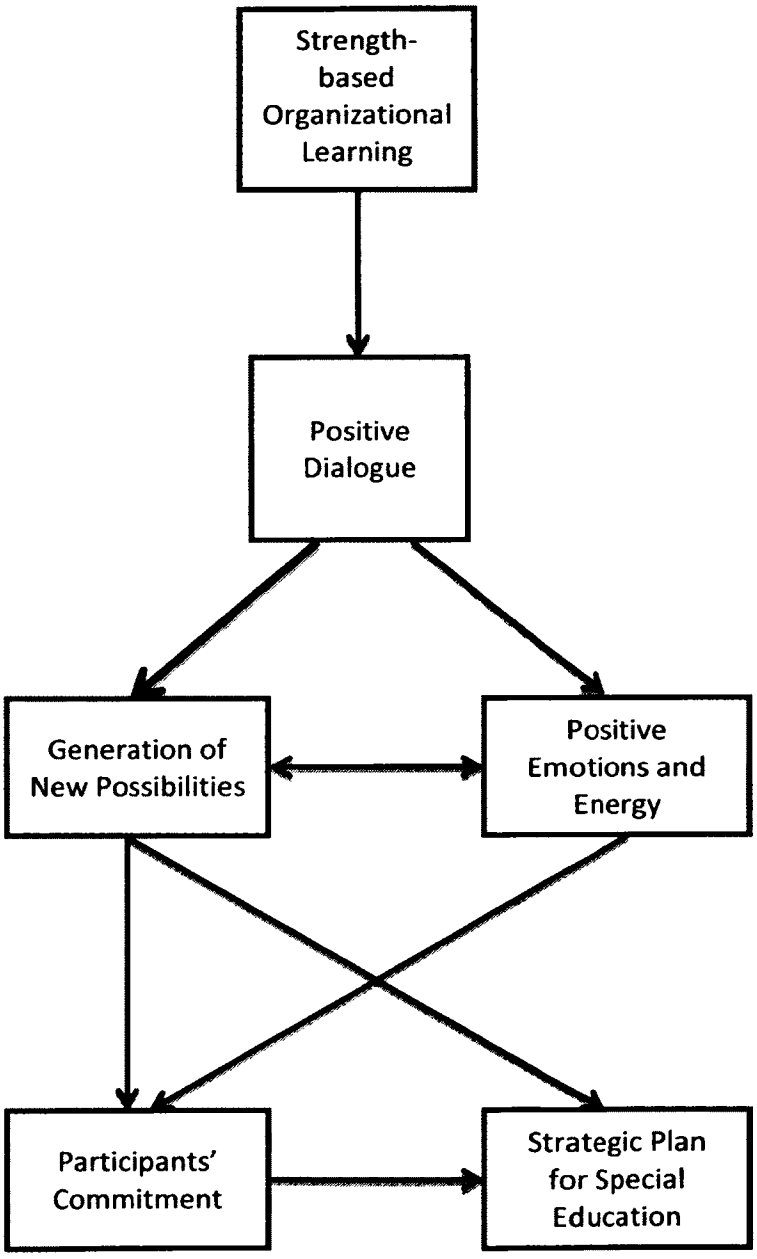
Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework for using AI as an approach to strategic planning in special education cannot possibly capture all variables, because like all applied approaches, there are numerous contextual factors that influence the process. Therefore, this conceptual framework (see Figure 1) endeavors to capture AI's theoretical approach as it would be employed to develop strategic plans under optimal conditions. The conceptual framework begins with strength-based organizational learning, which captures AI's capacity to inquire into the organization's strengths and wishes for the future. Since AI is deeply grounded in social constructionism, participants should engage in positive conversations as they learn about the organization's strengths and wishes for the future. The relationship between strength-based organizational learning and positive conversations is represented by the arrow pointing downward from the first box labeled strength-based organizational learning to the box labeled positive conversations. Next, as participants engage in positive conversations, they should experience positive emotions and energy as well as begin to generate new possibilities for the organization's future. The conceptual framework represents this relationship with two side by side boxes under the box labeled positive conversations. One box is labeled positive emotions and energy and the second is labeled generation of new possibilities. Additionally, the arrow between the two boxes identifies the reciprocal relationship between participants' positive emotions and energy and their ability to generate new possibilities. Next, the conceptual framework shows two additional boxes. One box is labeled strategic plan for

special education and the second box is labeled commitment. Both strategic plan for special education and participants' commitment to realizing the strategic plan flow from the participants' ability to generate new possibilities for the organization's future. Moreover, the arrow emerging from positive emotions and energy and pointing to participants' commitment illustrates the influence positive emotions and energy has on the development of participants' commitment. Additionally, the arrow pointing to strategic plan from commitment illustrates the importance of participant's commitment to realizing the strategic plan for special education. The following conceptual framework model endeavors to capture the focus of this descriptive mixed method case study into the application of AI as an approach to strategic planning in special education.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Model



Purpose of the Study

This study occurred in the Will's Mountain School District (WMSD), which is located in south central Pennsylvania east of Pittsburgh on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. The geography of the WMSD is rural with large ridges and valleys called the Valley and Ridge Appalachians. The district spans 292 square miles and serves four boroughs and six townships. The total population is 16,890 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000) and in the 2011-2012 school year, WMSD served 1864 students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012).

Politically, the residents of WMSD are overwhelmingly conservative. Both religion and tradition play a significant role in the lives of the residents. Churches are full every Sunday, and long-held events such as fall foliage, homecoming, fairs, and parades are always well-attended. Generally, the community prefers stability, and change usually occurs slowly. A symbolic example of the importance of tradition and the community's slow-to-change approach is Will's Mountain Senior High School, which proudly displays a plaque commemorating its 100th birthday. Schools recursively reflect their communities, therefore, similar to its community, WMSD values tradition both in its school buildings and in the manner in which the school district plans for the future.

In 2003, WMSD completed its last strategic plan entitled *the Will's Mountain School District Design for Future-Focused Success.* The district contracted with an outside consultant to facilitate the 2003 planning effort that lasted three days and involved 54 stakeholders. The development of this strategic plan is widely considered as an important event in the recent past history of the district. It is common for administrators and board members to quote or refer to the 2003 strategic plan in

meetings. The district's strategic plan guides decisions and creates a vision for the future grounded in the past. Understanding the importance of strategic planning, WMSD looked to the 2003 planning effort and resulting document as a potential model for its current strategic planning process.

Additionally, WMSD takes considerable pride in its academic and athletic accomplishments. Moreover, the Will's Mountain School District Board of Education values the opinions of its stakeholders and works diligently to maintain good public relations. Therefore, as WMSD approached its next strategic planning process, it sought a process which had the capacity to involve a large number of stakeholders in a time efficient process that tended to leverage past and present successes as a source of information for future planning. Thus, after a long debate about hiring an external facilitator or facilitating the strategic planning process internally, district officials read about AI and selected it as a compatible approach to strategic planning that met with tradition and the district's desire to focus on positive successes and engage many stakeholders.

The study was embedded in the WMSD strategic planning process. The study only examined the strategic planning process and not the pre-planning of the strategic planning process or the implementation of the plan. Also, the study only focused on the special education subcommittee, which consisted of eleven participants and one participant/researcher. Data collection for the study consisted of three strategic planning sessions using AI and a final session immediately following the strategic planning process. The study lasted for approximately one month.

The purpose of this study was to examine AI as an approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The study described special education subcommittee members' experiences and emerging plans as they utilized AI for strategic planning. Moreover, the study focused on the subcommittee members' perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning for special education. Finally, the study focused on AI's capacity as an approach to strategic planning by examining the process's ability to align with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning.

The study utilized case study methodology to describe how the subcommittee used AI to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school district. The study also employed a survey and focus group to gather information about participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as a process for strategic planning. It was hoped that this study provided significant information about what participants experienced and how they perceived AI. This information may be valuable to practitioners considering AI as a potential change process. Additionally, this study added to the extant research on AI in the educational content.

Also, the study analyzed the findings from the participants' experiences and emerging strategic plans using AI, and the subsequent survey and focus groups about participants' experiences and perceptions, to determine how well AI as employed in this study aligned with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning. This may have provided strategic planning practitioners with valuable information about AI's capacity as a process for strategic planning. Moreover, the findings further informed the

practice of strategic planning and may have offered an effective alternative process for strategic planning.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to examine an alternative approach to strategic planning for public schools. Additionally, this study endeavored to provide educational leaders and policymakers with vital information about strategic planning, which may influence them to consider exploring and/or permitting alternative approaches to strategic planning in public schools. This study endeavored to study AI as an approach to strategic planning and offered findings revealing the potential and limitations for employing AI for strategic planning in public education.

Research Questions

This study explored AI as an approach to developing a strategic plan for special education in a public school district in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and attempted to answer the following four questions:

1. How do plans for special education emerge as participants engage in the four phases of appreciative inquiry during strategic planning for the future of special education in a public school district?
2. What were participants' experiences and perceptions of appreciative inquiry as a method to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school district?
3. To what extent did participants' experiences using appreciative inquiry mirror the philosophical principles of appreciative inquiry?

4. To what extent did using appreciative inquiry to develop strategic plans align with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning in the next decade?

Statement of Significance and Value of the Study

Accountability, competition, and concerns over public education funding pressure public schools extensively to initiate change in an effort to improve their public value. Strategic planning offers public schools an approach to improve their public value, but the research on the practice of strategic planning in public education is limited and sparse (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004b). Thus, this study extended the research on utilizing AI to complete strategic planning in public schools.

Bryson (2010) opined that strategic planning will increase over the next decade. Moreover, he outlined eight predictions for the future direction of strategic planning. For example, Bryson predicted that strategic planning designs will multiply over the next decade. In conjunction with this prediction, he underscored that "practitioners and academics increasingly will demand greater evidence-based clarity about which approaches work best, for which purposes, in which circumstances, and why" (Bryson, 2010, p. 260). This statement begins to illuminate the significance of this study. This study provided evidence-based research for the efficacy of employing AI as an approach to strategic planning by examining its application in a given context for a specific purpose. Additionally, this study was not limited to only one of Bryson's eight predictions, but examined AI's capacity to meet all eight of Bryson's prediction for the future of strategic planning.

Hambright and Diamantes (2004b) provided further rationale for the importance of studying strategic planning in an educational setting. They revealed that additional research on strategic planning in an educational setting is necessary to further inform the practice. Hambright and Diamantes suggested,

> The literature is replete with educational strategic planning models; however, these models are prescriptive in their nature. Ascribed advantages to these models and their subsequent processes are suspect due to limited accounts within their literature of actual field testing or practice. (p. 237)

The lack of actual accounts from the field produces some unfortunate consequences. For example, school officials attempting strategic planning have very few examples to guide them in the process (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004b), therefore, producing confusion among school officials and leading to ineffective strategic planning (Kaufman, Herman, & Walters, 1996). In an effort to fill this gap in the research, this study endeavored to provide an actual example of strategic planning from the field as well as reveal the participants' experiences and perceptions of an approach to strategic planning.

In addition to adding to the research on strategic planning, this study added to extant research on AI. Chapter two reveals that the extant research on AI in education is very limited. Bushe and Kassam (2005) warned that the increasing popularity of AI has led to a dangerous time for AI. They shared a similar opinion as many other researchers (e.g., Bushe, 2011; Calabrese et al., 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011) who believed AI requires additional research. Further strengthening the importance of research on AI in education is the fact that AI only recently began to appear in education (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). In an effort

to further inform the application of AI in education, this study endeavored to add to the collective research on AI by explicitly examining AI's methodology, looking at the participants' experiences and emerging plans throughout each of AI's four phases. Additionally, this study attempted to be explicit about participants' experiences and perceptions of using AI by employing a mixed method approach using a survey in conjunction with a focus group to gather precise data from participants.

Connecting AI to strategic planning, McKenzie (2003) revealed the West Springfield Public Schools became the first school to elect to use AI as an approach to strategic planning. Since then, other studies (e.g., Calabrese, Hester, Friesen & Burkhalter, 2010; Filluel & Rowland, 2006; Price, Scully & Willoughby, 2007) examined AI as a change process with only tangential connection to actual strategic planning. Moreover, chapter two will demonstrate that there is virtually no published research examining AI as a method for strategic planning in special education. Therefore, this study may have resulted in the development of new ground in strategic planning in special education, and possibly for public education as a whole.

Lastly, this study may have benefited the public school required to develop a strategic plan for special education. The study was embedded in a public school district's larger strategic planning effort. Public schools in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in accordance with Title 22 Chapter 4 Section 13 entitled *Strategic Plans* of the *Pennsylvania School Code* are required to develop and file a strategic plan with the Department of Education every six years. Title 22 Chapter 14 Section 104 entitled *Special Education Plans* requires public schools to develop a strategic plan for special education every three years (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2012). The school district

participating in this study benefited from the study by developing a strategic plan for special education in a timely manner in accordance with the *Pennsylvania School Code*.

Definition of Terms

Deficit Thinking. A dominant habit of thinking that persistently focuses on problems, issues, risks, and gaps (Ryde, 2008).

Problem-solving Approach. Any process and/or approach that assume elements of an organization require fixing, and therefore, endeavors to solve problems as a way of improving the performance of the organization (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Special Education. The services and programs provided to students with disabilities by teachers and other related service personnel who hold a certification in special education and/or other areas in accordance with federal and/or state laws (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004).

Stakeholders. This term is defined as anyone who is affected by the decisions of the local school district. For example, school district staff, students, parents, business owners, and community members as taxpayers are impacted by the decisions of the local school district, and are therefore, considered stakeholders (Holcomb, 2009).

Strategic Management. This is the ongoing practice of strategic learning, thinking, and acting in an effort to manage the organization's implementation and execution of strategies in order to progressively react to changing variables and advance the organization's plans for the future (Poister, 2010).

Strategic planning. This is a multi-phase process in which organizations undertake planning for the future. During this process, organizations establish a vision of their future, gather information about their current status, make key decisions, and choose

strategies necessary for realizing their envisioned future (Bryson, 2004). Excellent strategic planning should produce "imagination" and "commitment" in organizations (Bryson, 2004, p. 6).

Strength-based Approach. An approach to organizational development and change that assumes organizations have strengths. The approach endeavors to understand the organization's strengths and capture their capacity in order to transform the organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Summary

This study examined AI as an approach to developing a strategic plan for special education in a public school. Specifically, this study examined the plan as it emerged from a strategic planning effort using AI. Also, this study explored the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Moreover, the study examined the alignment between AI as an approach to strategic planning and Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning. Additionally, this study added to the recent extant research about AI in public education. In summary, this study ultimately explored AI as an alternative approach to the current problem-solving approaches to strategic planning omnipresent in public education today. Chapter two will investigate the extant literature and research on strategic planning and AI in public education.

Chapter 2: A Review of Relevant Literature

Chapter two provides a firm foundation for examining the application of AI as a method for developing strategic plans for special education in public schools. The chapter presents essential program elements, relevant research and critiques of the efficacy of AI and strategic planning. It begins with a historic perspective of strategic planning including predictions for future practice. Next, the chapter examines the potential benefits and limitations of strategic planning. Then, the chapter moves to strategic planning in the context of education. The chapter reveals that extant research and literature underscore the need for additional research in strategic planning.

Following strategic planning, the chapter presents AI's philosophical underpinnings and methodology. Moreover, the chapter provides a critique of AI, which highlights the importance of additional research to better understand AI's capacity and limitations. Next, the chapter examines AI in the context of education and provides a review of the extant research, which either use AI as an approach to change or as a methodology to study topics in education. Also, the literature review provides pertinent information elucidating important findings and gaps in the research.

The chapter continues with a brief overview of special education's tumultuous history. Additionally, the chapter briefly examines the complexity of educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. In turn, the complexity of special education accentuates the need for strategic planning. Lastly, the paucity of research about the application of AI in special education is discussed, which highlights a need for

additional research about using AI as a method for strategic planning in special education.

Strategic Planning

The history of strategic planning begins in the middle of the 20th century, continues through the current day, and projects into the future. Many scholars of strategic planning (e.g., Bryson, 2010; Poister, 2010) point to Vieg as an important political scientist who gave strategic planning a boost in the 1940s. Vieg called for positive planning at the regional and state levels with a specific focus on municipal planning (Bryson, 2010). Although, Vieg asserted a need for planning in municipalities, strategic planning did not immediately find a foothold in the public sector. In the mid-1970s, literature began to encourage nonprofit organizations to apply established management processes from the business sector such as strategic planning (Kearns & Scarpino, 1996). While authors such as Vieg called for applying strategic planning in the public sector, it was not until the 1980s when strategic planning became a tool for planning in some public sectors such as the military (Bryson, 2004). Still, strategic planning did not reach its current level of application until the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, which required all federal departments and agencies to develop and periodically update strategic plans (Poister, 2010, p. 247). Additionally, many states have similar laws requiring strategic plans (Bryson, 2010, p. 258). Today, strategic planning occurs commonly in for-profit, nonprofit, and public organizations.

Strategic planning has become ubiquitous to all types of organizations in the United States and is projected to continue to be an important part of organizations in the future. Poister (2010) believed strategic planning will be vital for organizations over the

next ten years as they anticipate and deal with change. Similarly, Bryson (2010) opined that the positive results realized through strategic planning will lead to increased growth in strategic planning in the next ten years. Moreover, he believed strategic planning's future will be as a practice rather than a process. To this end, Bryson (2010) projected the following future direction of strategic planning:

- The need for strategic thinking, acting, and learning is only going to increase in the next decade.
- Approaches or designs for strategic planning will continue to proliferate-although they may be called by other names.
- Pressure for more inclusive approaches will increase, both for intra-and interorganizational change efforts, along with greater knowledge of effective practices for doing so.
- Pressure will increase for the use of methods that integrate analysis and synthesis into strategic planning.
- The changes predicted here sit uneasily with increased expectations of, or requirement for, speedy responses to serious challenges.
- Greater clarity will develop about what strategies actually work in which circumstances, and why.
- A major category of strategic issues will revolve around strategic alignment.
- There will be a heightened emphasis on strategic planning as a way of knowing and learning (pp. 260-262).

Clearly, strategic planning as a practice is projected to evolve over the next decade.

After examining the past, present, and future of strategic planning, it is important to develop a common understanding of strategic planning. Bryson (2004) defined strategic planning as "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (p. 6). Recently, Bryson (2010) updated his definition of strategic planning,

> As a deliberative effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is (its identity), what it does (its strategies and actions), and why it does it (mandates, mission, goals and the creation of public value). (p. 256-257)

While these definitions begin to create an understanding of strategic planning, its role as a subset of strategic management provides further clarification. Strategic management consists of strategic thinking, acting, and learning (Bryson, 2004). In turn, strategic planning serves as a process to foster strategic thinking, acting, and learning (Bryson, 2010). Therefore, strategic planning is linked to strategic management as a process capable of fostering strategic thinking, acting, and learning, which is necessary to guide current decisions and actions in an effort to realize the organization's future.

Benefits of strategic planning. Organizations can realize numerous benefits through strategic planning. Universally, strategic planning is applied as a practice to deal with uncertainty in the face of constant change, because organizations with plans to deal with future issues are believed to be better prepared for insecurity (Bryson, 2004; Mintzberg, 1993). Historically, strategic planners point to the increasing occurrence of crisis and the need to effectively deal with crisis as a major benefit of strategic planning

(Mintzberg, 1993). The underlining assumption is that organizations with strategic plans will deal more effectively with future change.

Strategic planning offers additional benefits. Policymakers advocate for strategic planning with the belief that better planning will lead to better performance (Boyne & Gould-Williams, 2003, p. 116). Kaufman and Herman (1991) further refined this benefit of strategic planning. They identified the organization's ability to make sensible decisions based on the organization's primary clients' needs as a significant benefit. Hence, organizations possessing knowledge of clients' needs have valuable insight allowing for better performance. Building upon the idea of better performance, Bryson (2010) captured the potential benefits of strategic planning as (a) promoting strategic thinking, acting, and learning, (b) offering the capacity to improve decision making, (c) increasing the effectiveness, responsiveness and resiliency of an organization, (d) addressing broader societal problems through inter-organizational collaboration, and (e) positively benefiting stakeholders (p. 255). Bryson's list of additional benefits derived from strategic planning summarizes both the urgency to plan for future change as well as some additional positive benefits derived from strategic planning.

Critical review of strategic planning. While proponents of strategic planning pontificate the importance of strategic planning, opponents equally raise considerable doubt about its benefits. In his seminal work, *The Pitfalls of Strategic Planning*, Mintzberg (1993) offered a critique of strategic planning and strategic planners. He opined that strategic planners are constantly in a state of unfounded crisis. Mintzberg pointed out that while strategic planners in the 1960s and 1970s proclaimed great turbulence and change, they were shortsighted in comparison to the turbulence and

change experienced during the Great Depression and World War II. Notwithstanding his strong critique of strategic planners and crisis, Mintzberg also asserted that specific plans may inhibit an organization's vision or ability to learn, therefore, rendering the organization incapable of adapting to unintended changes. Hence, strategic planning may actually paralyze organizations in the face of unanticipated change.

Somewhat less critical of strategic planning, Quinn (1980) offered an incremental approach to strategic change rather than a detailed strategic planning approach. He explained most changes in organizations occur incrementally following an event or study. Thus as events occur, management is required to make strategic decisions incrementally based on ever-changing variables. Providing further evidence for incrementalism, Quinn pointedly suggested that it is impossible for strategic planners to predict the future. Therefore, it is virtually impossible to plan for all possible future realities. Even though opponents criticize strategic planning's efficacy, many policymakers continue to look at strategic planning as a way to enhance organizational performance (Boyne & Gould-Williams, 2003).

Policymakers in Taiwan require public managers in the central government of Taiwan to complete strategic planning on a regular basis. Huang (2006) studied this strategic planning effort and found strategic planning did not realize its full potential chiefly due to its incapacity to deal with political realities. Moreover, Huang warned that a one-size-fits-all approach to strategic planning fails to take into account significant variables such as policy design and politics. Additionally, he posited a need for additional research on strategic management in order to determine its usefulness as an approach to planning for future events. Huang is not alone is this assertion. Many

researchers believed further research on strategic planning is necessary to better understand the process and its essential elements (e.g., Boyne & Gould-William, 2003; Bryson, 2010; Huang, 2006; Kearns & Scarpino, 1996). In summary, Huang explained that while strategic planning is growing in popularity and advocates for strategic planning offer it as an approach to deal with future change, there are few research studies providing evidence for the efficacy of strategic planning.

Strategic Planning in Education

Strategic planning's history in education mirrored its history in other public organizations. Initially, strategic planning began in the business sector in the 1960s and steadily migrated to the public sector over the following decades (McCune, 1986). In the 1990s, strategic planning in education was a relatively new development and its planning models were generally adopted based on iterations in the business sector. Like many public institutions, schools receive public funding to provide society with a particular service, and consequently, they must be cognizant of their public value (Bryson, 2004). In order to maintain their public value, Kaufman, Herman, and Watters (1996) suggested that schools seeking to improve their performance will have to "plan and think strategically-moving from reactive to proactive planning" (p. 4). Additionally, federal and state initiatives led to the prevalence of strategic planning in education (Webster & Luehe, 1992). For example, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) mandates planning for schools failing to meet adequate yearly progress and emphasizes school accountability for performance in exchange for public funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Additionally states such as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have statutes mandating periodic strategic planning in school districts. Title 22 Chapter 4 Section13 entitled

Strategic Plans and Chapter 14 Section 104 entitled *Special Education Plans* of the Pennsylvania Code require school districts to complete strategic planning periodically and submit those plans to the state for review (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2012). Hence, many schools either choose to participate in or are mandated to complete strategic plans (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004b). Clearly, the climate of school improvement and current economic conditions will continue to pressure schools to plan strategically in order to maintain their public value.

Benefits of strategic planning in education. Schools, like other public organizations, benefit from strategic planning as a way to produce strategic management (McCune, 1986). Fidler (1996) advanced the utility of strategic management in the context of education. He described strategic management as the "creation and implementation of strategies in response to and in anticipation of future events and trends in the outside world" (p. 50). Therefore, the value of strategic planning stems from aligning current decisions and actions in anticipation of future conditions (Webster & Luehe, 1992). Facing considerable change, schools may benefit significantly from strategic planning as a way to produce strategic management.

Goal realization is an additional benefit of strategic planning. Schools, with many stakeholders demanding improvement, must utilize planning in order to produce significant change (Rutherford, 2007). For example, strategic planning can help schools meet students' needs while using limited resources in the most efficient and effective manner (Webster & Luehe, 1992). Also, while students possess a variety of needs, NCLB underscores the need for public schools to be accountable for student performance and requires schools failing to meet this mandate to create improvement plans. Fernandez

(2011) studied the effect of school improvement plans on academic performance. He explained that while school improvement plans are not often referred to as strategic plans, they have many similar characteristics. As part of his study, he examined various components of school improvement plans and found schools that develop plans with goals and specific timeframes for monitoring school performance tended to produce higher levels of student improvement on standardized tests. As Fernandez's study revealed, there appears to be some evidence of a connection between quality planning and improving student performance on standardized tests.

Strategic planning may facilitate the development of partnerships and collaboration between various agencies resulting in an efficient approach to meeting students' needs. To this end, Kaufman et al. (1996) explained, "strategic planning is a forward-looking proactive option. It seeks to create a better future by encouraging educational partners to join together in defining and achieving important results and contributions" (p. 4). Increasingly education systems and other governmental agency are tasked with working collaboratively to meet students' needs. For example, it is not uncommon to have a variety of agencies in attendance at a student's individualized education plan meeting, working in concert to effectively and efficiently meet the student's needs.

Critical review of strategic planning in education. While the benefits of strategic planning in education encompass many of the same benefits as strategic planning in other public organizations, it equally receives some similar criticism. Hambright and Diamantes (2004b) completed a literature review of strategic planning in education analyzing 66 books, 29 journal articles, 28 research presentations, six

dissertations and several miscellaneous sources. Hambright and Diamantes asserted that research in educational strategic planning is sparse and limited in scope. Similar to other researchers (e.g., Boyne & Gould-William, 2003; Bryson, 2010; Huang, 2006; Kearns & Scarpino, 1996), Hambright and Diamantes believed that additional research in strategic planning is necessary to further inform the practice. Moreover, Kaufman et al. (1996) and Webster and Luehe (1992) both expounded the benefits of strategic planning and questioned the overall effectiveness of strategic planning in education. Kaufman et al. explained that one possible reason for ineffective planning efforts may be confusion amongst educators attempting to undertake strategic planning. Additionally, the inability of planning models to produce satisfactory results has made some educators skeptical about strategic planning's capacity (Webster & Luehe, 1992). Revealing concerns about planning in education, Dunaway, Kim, and Szad (2012) studied teachers' and principals' perceptions of school improvement plans' impact on school improvement. The study design consisted of a 22 question survey completed by 403 staff members including 322 teachers, 10 principals, 12 assistant principals, 20 counselors, and 39 other staff members. Their results showed nine out of ten principals, with one non-respondent, perceived the planning process as valuable and that school improvement plans impact school improvement significantly. In contrast, 26% of the teachers viewed the process of planning as valuable, but also believed the process had little impact on school improvement (Dunaway et al., 2012, p. 164). In summary, while strategic planning in education may be undertaken voluntarily and/or mandated as a method for improving schools, strategic planning in education requires additional research in order to realize its full potential and benefits.

Essential elements of strategic planning in education. Strategic planning in schools varies greatly depending on the district and state. A variety of strategic planning models are available for schools to choose from such as: Strategy Change Cycle (Bryson, 2004), Total Quality Management (Deming, 1982), Mega-Planning (Kaufman et al., 1996), School Improvement Planning Process (Lezotte & Jacoby, 1992), and School Change as Inquiry (Holcomb, 2009). Additionally, many states develop their own models for strategic planning. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2012) developed a tool called Comprehensive Planning and requires all school districts to complete the planning process using this tool. Therefore, schools either elect to use a strategic planning model from literature or are subject to a mandated model to complete strategic planning, which results in great diversity of strategic planning models.

Consequently, the variety of strategic planning models leads to equally diverse elements amongst the models. Hambright and Diamantes (2004a) reviewed strategic planning models employed in education looking at the following eight elements identified by Knight (1997):

- Preplanning
- Vision and /or mission statements
- Core beliefs
- Environmental including external and internal scans
- Identifying and prioritizing strategic issues
- Strategic issues

- Developing strategic resolutions
- Compelling guidelines. (p. 97)

Their analysis revealed inconsistencies in the appearance of the elements across strategic planning models. Moreover, Hambright and Diamantes explained that there is no agreement about what elements are critical to the strategic planning process in education. State-developed plans further confound the current status of strategic planning in education. The Comprehensive Planning process developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education directs school districts through the following steps: (a) preplanning, (b) complete a needs assessment, (c) identify needs, (d) prioritize needs, and (e) develop an action plan to improve needs (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Comparing the elements of the Comprehensive Planning Process to the eight elements studied by Hambright and Diamantes underscores Hambright and Diamantes' findings of inconsistencies in strategic planning models. In summary, the elements of strategic planning models vary greatly from school to school and even state to state.

Stakeholders. Stakeholder involvement consistently appears in strategic planning efforts in education. Bryson (2004) defined a stakeholder as "any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on an organization's attention, resources, or outputs or that is affected by that output" (p. 35). Holcomb (2009), who preferred to refer to stakeholders as shareholders, identified some key shareholders who may be involved in strategic planning. She divided shareholders into two groups, external and internal shareholders. Holcomb identified parents, social service agencies, businesses and taxpayers who do not have children attending school as external shareholders. Internal shareholders include administrators, teachers, and support personnel such as clerical,

food and transportation services (Holcomb, 2009). Clearly, stakeholders represent diverse groups all with a claim to public education's attention, resources, and outputs.

Involving stakeholders in strategic planning in education is of paramount importance (Holcomb; 2009; Kaufman et al., 1996; Lezotte & Jacoby, 1992; Rutherford, 2007). Lezotte and Jacoby (1992) issued a clear warning to educators planning change, "don't get too far ahead of your stakeholder groups, particularly the community and school board" (p. 45). Hence, they warned it is important for stakeholders to have an opportunity to ask questions and be involved in change efforts. Rutherford (2007) provided an additional explanation of the importance of stakeholder involvement. She explained that strategic planning in education, unlike in corporate settings, tends to be more dynamic and constructivist. Therefore, in the context of education, stakeholders should have the opportunity for dialogue and collaboration.

Winand and Edlefson (2008) studied focus groups as a mechanism to engage stakeholders and inform strategic planning. They described focus groups as a way to identify and explore stakeholders' reactions to issues, problems, and changes, which, in turn, can be used to inform strategic planning. The focus groups they studied consisted of a cross section of the community such as teachers, parents, students, business people, farmers etc. Moreover, school administrators facilitated the focus groups. Windand and Edlefson found that community members appreciated the opportunity to voice their opinions in the focus groups. Additionally, they found that focus groups led by school administrators appeared to enhance community support for change initiatives. Windand and Edlefson asserted that a partnership between a school and its community is vital in strategic planning. Therefore, while many elements of strategic planning vary from place

to place, identifying and involving key stakeholders is critical to strategic planning in education.

In summary, strategic planning offers some potential benefits to schools facing current challenges and turbulent futures. In order to realize those potential benefits, there is a need for additional research into strategic planning in education. Moreover, there is a need for research into strategic planning models to better understand their capacity to involve stakeholders and produce strategic plans.

Appreciative Inquiry

A brief examination of the history of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) merits some consideration in order to develop a complete understanding of AI. AI was the result of a new perspective generated in 1980 by a doctoral student at Case Western University named David Cooperrider in collaboration with Suresh Srivastva, a professor at Case Western University. In the process of completing his doctoral study in physician leadership at a leading medical center in the United States, Cooperrider refocused his study to look only at data revealing physician's leadership and organizational effectiveness at its very best (Coghlan, Preskill, & Tzavaras, 2003). In 1986, Cooperrider completed his doctoral dissertation entitled, *Appreciative Inquiry: Toward a Methodology for Understanding and Enhancing Organizational Innovation.* A year later, Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) published *Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life,* which expanded greatly on the ideas found in Cooperrider's dissertation. Additionally, the co-published article is notable because it signaled a transformation for AI from a theory to a framework for intervention (Watkins, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011). While AI began to receive attention at a few conferences during the mid-1980s, it entered a new phase when

Cooperrider collaborated with Watkins on her work in South Africa. The experience inspired the formation of the Social Innovations in Global Management (SIGMA) research study (Bushe, 2012). The Purpose of SIGMA was to study and develop innovative organizations and leaders capable of producing positive solutions to difficult global issues (Watkins et al., 2011). Elsewhere, AI continued to expand with the founding of several other organizations such the Taos Institute and the Global Excellence in Management Initiative funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (Coghlan et al., 2003). In the 1990s, authors began to publish books on AI and the National Training Laboratory began to offer trainings about AI taught by Watkins and Mohr. With the turning of the millennium, AI became the topic of numerous books and articles (Bushe, 2012). Watkins et al. captured AI's growth, "over the last decade AI has spread to every corner of the globe and has impacted every form of human organization-corporations, governments, international groups, schools, churches and more" (p. 30). Today, AI is used in the business, public, and nonprofit sectors.

Appreciative inquiry theory. The history of AI reveals its meteoric growth over the last three decades from a doctoral thesis to an approach to organizational development used globally in a variety of settings. AI theory evolved and was refined over the same period of time. In Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) seminal article entitled *Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life*, they asserted that action research needs to evolve in order for it to reach its full potential. Cooperrider and Srivastva grounded AI in action research and sought to improve the overall current state of action research by freeing it from the constraints of problem-solving. They opined that action research is constrained by its emphasis on problem-solving and inability to generate new

ideas beyond the scope of the problem. They believed action research failed to discover organizations' mysteries, thus failing to produce new ideas derived from a full range of the organizations' endeavors, including its successes. With this theoretical perspective, Cooperrider and Srivastva developed a new approach to action research and called it Appreciative Inquiry (AI).

AI is also influenced by social constructionism. Cooperrider was influenced by the work of Gergen (1978) who wrote about social constructionism (Bushe, 2012). Social constructionism holds that there are many realities in the world and that individuals make sense of those realities through communication (Lock & Strong, 2010). Additionally, Burr (2003) explained that not only is meaning socially constructed, but individuals take action based on those meanings. Therefore, the creation of social meaning also has the potential to lead to action. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) understood the connection between socially created realities as a source of life, and their potential for re-creating organizations. Guided by this understanding, they focused on collaboration and dialogue in the development of their new approach to action research.

In summary, AI is grounded in action research and influenced by social constructionism. Additionally, current literature also provides a set of principles, which further illuminates the philosophical underpinnings of AI. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) provided the following principles: (a) the Constructionist Principle, (b) the Principle of Simultaneity, (c) the Poetic Principle, (d) the Anticipatory Principle, and (e) the Positive Principle (pp. 49-53).

Examining these philosophical principles will foster a greater understanding of AI.

The constructionist principle. The constructionist principle is grounded in social constructionism and holds that human knowledge and the future of organizations are connected (Fitzgerald, Murrell & Newman, 2001). To this end, "the locus of knowledge is in our relationships and we construct our reality through our conversations and social interactions" (Finegold, Holland & Lingham, 2002, p. 237). In accordance with the constructionist principle, relationships and conversations are forms of human knowledge that, when accessed, have the ability to create new realities. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) further expanded on this idea of knowing as a major shift in western intellectual thinking from "I think therefore I am" to "we communicate therefore we are" (p. 50). Therefore, organizations are created and recreated through the interactions of its members (Grant & Humphries, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Hence, practitioners of AI believe that organizations are socially created and social interactions have the potential to shape the future of organizations.

An important element of the constructionist principle is human interaction, particularly in the form of conversations. The constructionist principal of AI holds that humans make meaning of their environment socially (Calabrese et al., 2007). People in organizations participate in conversations about the world around them and come to an agreement about what they see and how to respond (Watkins et al., 2011). These conversations are not only the lenses for viewing the current state of an organization, but also have the power to transform the organization (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). As people begin to talk differently about their organization, they begin to change their organization, transforming it with language (Bushe, 2001). Public dialogue has the ability to free people from their current constraints, opening the path to achieving

their desired future (Finegold et al., 2002). In accordance with the constructionist principle, people not only create the world around them, but also have the power through conversations to begin to re-create that world depending on the nature of their conversations.

The simultaneity principle. The principle of simultaneity represents a fundamental difference between traditional action research and AI. Traditional action research holds that inquiry informs diagnosis leading to change. In contrast, AI holds that change begins with the first question (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Ludema et al., 2009). Watkins et al. (2011) explained that the first questions are fateful and will direct the organization's energy, producing change. In AI, inquiry is viewed as an intervention with the power to produce change and shape the future of the organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Finegold et al., 2002; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Questions define the focus of the inquiry and guide conversations amongst participants, which in turn facilitate the co-creation of a new future (Fitzgerald et al., 2001). The articulation of questions is one of the most important aspects of AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Questions in AI should elicit affirmative information about the individuals involved in the organization or the organization at its ideal best (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The simultaneity principle holds that well-articulated questions will produce conversations amongst AI participants about affirmative experiences. The first questions produce thoughts and inform positive conversations about future possibilities, thus beginning the process of re-creating the organization's future. In accordance with the principle of simultaneity, change begins with the first question.

The poetic principle. The essence of the poetic principle is the freedom to study whatever topics members of the organization desire. Connected to social constructionism, the poetic principle holds that topics of study are not dictated, but rather they are socially created (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). This is important because it frees participants to study any topic in the organization (Fitzgerald et al., 2001). Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) explicated that this is significant because it provides freedom from asking the same questions repeatedly, and consequently, producing the same response. The freedom to ask any questions also allows participants to choose their lens for looking at the organization (Finegold et al., 2002). The opportunity to choose any lens provides considerable power. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) explained, "The poetic principle connects intention to attention. The more people attend to the positive dimensions of the present moment, the more positive will their intentions be for future moments" (p. 424). Explaining this concept in a different way, Bushe and Kassam (2005) provided the analogy that organizations are like an open book in a constant state of revision and the words filling the pages are written by the people within the organization. Thus, like authors, people choose what they talk about, which has an impact far greater than mere words. People's chosen topics of conversation have the power to provoke emotions and create a new reality. The poetic principle provides freedom to choose any topic for study, and in so doing, choose any lens for viewing the organization, which have powerful consequences for the future vision of the organization.

The anticipatory principle. The anticipatory principle holds that organizations will become what its members imagine. People within organizations socially create organizations based on their collective imagination (Cooperrider et al., 1995).

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) and Cameron, Dutton and Quinn (2003) theorized that appreciative inquiry leverages appreciative knowledge of peak performance in the past and present to generate visions of the future. The process of creating visions of the future are often referred to as positive imagery. The power of positive imaginary to produce positive action has been studied in several fields including medicine, sports psychology, and education (Finegold et al., 2002; Fitzgerald et al., 2001). Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) expanded upon the connection between positive imaginary and positive actions. They explained the visions of the future guide the current actions of the organization and its members. In others words, the organization and its members align its current actions with their collective vision in order to realize their positive image. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) provided further insight into the specificity of the visions of the future. They suggested that visions of the future should be specific rather than a vague belief of future improvement. Recursively, the anticipatory principle holds that specific visions of the future created through inquiry into past and present experiences of exceptional performance direct current actions towards the organization's ultimate goal of realizing its socially created future.

The positive principle. The positive principle connects positive emotions and energy to current actions leading to the realization of an organization's future vision. Calabrese, Hester, Friesen, and Burkhalter (2010) explained that AI can trace its roots to humanistic psychology and the Work of James and Maslow. Additionally, AI is often connected to positive psychology with both sharing an understanding of the power of positive emotions (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2008). Cooperrider and Avital (2004) shined light on the connection between AI and positive emotions. They stated, "to

appreciate also means to be grateful or thankful for--it is a way of being and maintaining a positive stance along the path of life's journey" (p. xii). In AI, inquiry is designed to generate conversations about organizational strengths and successes. These conversations produce positive energy and emotions important to building and sustaining momentum for change (Fitzgerald et al., 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011). There are many ways the positive principle embedded in AI can build and sustain change. AI has the potential to change the current social condition by replacing cynicism with hope (Elliott, 1999, p. 281). Also, focusing on the positive during the AI process can produce more positive emotions thus facilitating generative thinking and acting (Bushe, 2007). Lewis (2011) provided some key insights into how AI works, which reveals the benefits of positivity. She explained,

> Inquiry creates reality, focus, direction and growth; that organizations have a positive core which is a key asset for positive growth; that positive emotions are a source of organizational energy and growth; that a growth in relational connectedness leads to increased community spirit and understanding; that growth and change can happen in non-linear dynamic ways; and that the self-organizing ability of organizations is a basis for sustainable growth (p. 159).

Lewis (2011) mapped the complex connection between inquiry, positive emotions and organizational growth leading to change. The positive principle holds that when participants focus on organizational strengths and successes they experience positive emotions and energy, which in turn provide the energy to sustain growth.

In summary, AI was developed as a thoughtful change in traditional action research, shifting the focus away from using inquiry to inform diagnosis leading to

change to creating change through inquiry. AI gives credence to the human experience and meaning as well as values human involvement in creating and re-creating organizations. The principles of AI provide further insight into the complexity of this relatively new innovation in action research. AI is a form of action research that employs inquiry into the organization's strengths and successes on any desired topic through conversations. Those conversations examine positive organizational information and generate positive emotions and energy for future growth. Participants inspired by their discoveries and sustained by positive emotions and energy, collectively reimagine and recreate the organization's future. Inspired by their images of the future, participants align their current actions with their desired future.

Appreciative inquiry contrasted with problem-solving approaches. In order to develop a complete understanding of AI theory, it is imperative to compare AI, which focuses on strengths, with traditional action research's focus on problems. Stringer (2007) defined action research as "a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in everyday lives" (p.1). As defined, action research is employed to solve a problem. Examining Plano Clark and Creswell's (2010) key characteristics of practical action research provides further evidence of action research's traditional problem-solving approach. Their first key characteristic of action research placed emphasis on the action researcher solving a problem. Thus, traditional action research begins with an assumption that there exists a problem requiring a solution. This form of thinking is often referred to as deficit thinking, which has become the dominant mode of thinking and easily identifiable in

language. Words indicating a possibility of deficit thinking are risks, problems, issues and gaps (Ryde, 2008, p. 55).

Similar to action research, it should be noted that many of these words permeate strategic planning. Moreover, McKenzie (2003) explained many school districts tend to approach strategic planning through problem-solving processes. Kaufman et al. (1996) writing about educational planning stated, "reactive response to problems are vital when things are going wrong...Most educational organizations have plenty of problems" (p. 81). Similarly, Rutherford (2007) called for better planning in order to overcoming deficiencies in schools. Finally, in Dunaway et al.'s (2012) study of teachers' and principals' perceptions of improvement plans, they provided some recommendations for refining school improvement planning. Their first recommendation called for increasing knowledge of the problem. Clearly, the language of deficit thinking permeates strategic planning illuminating deficit thinking's influence on strategic planning.

AI differs from traditional action research and many strategic planning approaches, which use inquiry to diagnose and solve problems. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) took issue with traditional action research, opining that it failed as an instrument for advancing social knowledge as it is currently imprisoned in deficit thinking. In comparing participatory action research with AI, Boyd and Bright (2007) expounded that AI magnifies current strengths as a means to produce change. Therefore, AI focuses on desired attributes and performances using affirmative language such as strengths (Coghlan et al., 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011), what gives energy and life (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004), and values (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010) In turn, Bushe (2001) explained positive

qualities are tracked and fanned, meaning that they are sought and amplified. To this end, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) suggested that a focus on problems will only reveal more problems, whereas a focus on strengths and potential will produce more potential. AI begins with the belief that all organizations have strengths and that through inquiry; AI exposes the key elements producing those strengths. After developing an understanding of these elements, it seeks to create greater capacity for change by leveraging those positive elements of peak performance into other areas as needed.

Critical review of appreciative inquiry. While AI has grown exponentially in the last decade as an innovation in action research, it has not been without criticism. Several researchers have called for additional research on AI (e.g., Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Bushe, 2011; Calabrese et al., 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011), while others have called for a critical evaluation of AI (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Daematteo & Reeves, 2011; Grant & Humphries, 2006). In summary, AI requires additional research and evaluation in order to fully understand its potential and limitations.

Bushe and Kassam (2005) completed a meta-analysis of AI reviewing 20 cases using AI and found only seven cases showed transformational outcomes. Their study revealed two key themes commonly found in cases producing transformational outcomes. The first key theme was a radical prescription of AI focusing on how people's thinking leads to the creation of new ideas rather than a focus on their actions. Bushe and Kassam explicated that this approach differs greatly from conventional organizational development, which tends to focus on changing norms and behavior. Secondly, Bushe

and Kassam explained that conventional usages of AI tend to produce conventional change processes. They suggested that AI itself will not lead to substantial change. To this end, Bushe and Kassam warned that employing AI without producing new meaning and self-organization may lead to the same outcomes as other action research approaches.

Additionally, Bushe (2007) and Bushe (2010) issued warnings about overemphasizing positivity, overlooking AI's true purpose, which is to generate change. Bushe (2007) explained "a focus on [the] positive is useful for appreciative inquiry, but it's not the purpose. The purpose is to generate a new and better future" (p. 4). Similarly, Bushe (2010) expressed concern about people claiming to do AI without understanding its true purpose. He warned that people become fixated on the positive approach of AI and overlook the importance of generativity as an outcome. AI practitioners cannot assume that inquiry into organizational strengths and successes producing positive emotions will lead to AI's ultimate goals of re-imagination and re-creation (Bushe, 2007).

Several researchers have called for critical evaluations of AI (e.g., Daematteo & Reeves, 2011; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Van der Haar and Hosking (2004) called for an interwoven approach to evaluating AI. They explained that relational social constructionism exposes multiple local realities and opined it may be interwoven with AI. To this end, AI has the potential to critically examine all realities rather than focusing solely on one reality, that of positive performance. Similarly, Grant and Humphries (2006) proposed synthesizing critical theory and appreciative inquiry in order to foster a more critical inquiry. They suggested that critical theory would enhance appreciative inquiry, expanding it beyond looking at positive deviations and exposing it

to the full range of human experiences including negativity. Grant and Humphries asserted that critical theory, in combination with AI, may provide a fuller approach, which exposes power imbalances, exploitations, and violations.

Dematteo and Reeves (2011) studied AI and found some participants expressed concerns over AI's lack of critical examination of existing problems and concerns. Embedded in a larger study, Dematteo and Reeves completed 50 interviews examining the experiences and expectations of participants. They found many participants welcomed the positivity, creativity, mutual respect, and relationship building experienced during AI. However, other participants raised concerns about AI. Some participants expressed concerns about AI's inability to address critical issues and suggested AI lacked substance due to its overemphasis on positivity. These findings led Dematteo and Reeves to call for a more critical approach to AI by combining it with critical theory, producing Critical Appreciative Processes. This approach would allow for a more critical examination of an organization revealing both positive and negative aspects. In summary, AI is often criticized for focusing solely on the organization's positive attributes, and consequently, ignoring the full range of human experiences. To this end, critiques of AI call for a more critical approach to organizational development, additional research, and a fuller evaluation of AI.

Appreciative Inquiry as an Approach to Organizational Change

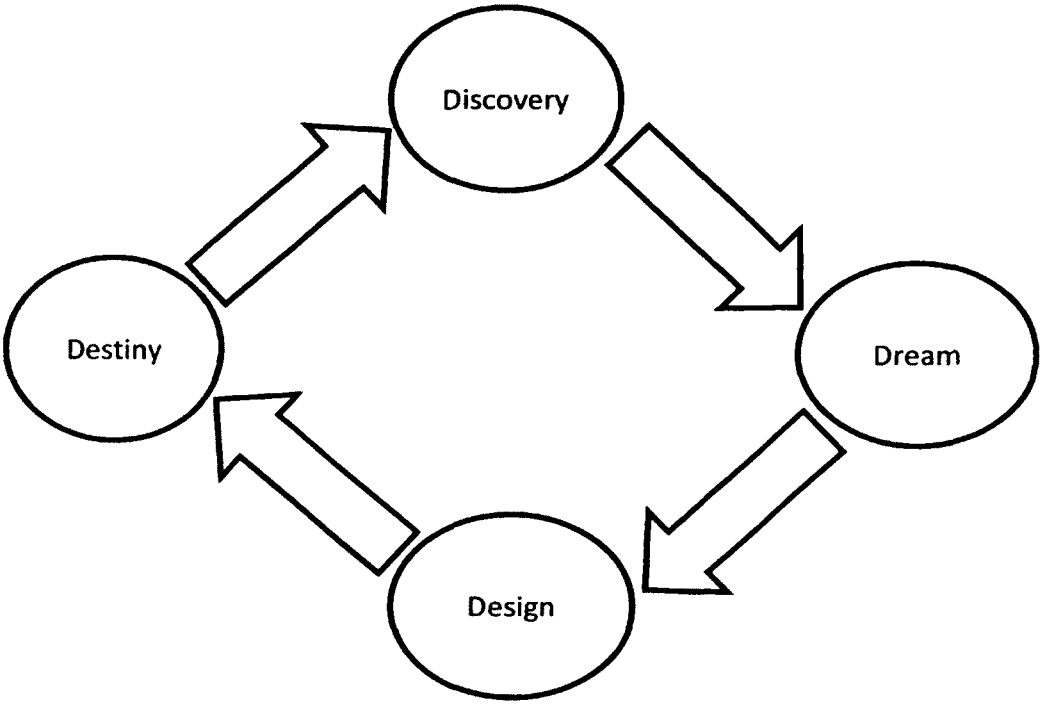
The theory and principles of AI provide an understanding of its underpinnings, but stop short of providing an explanation of how AI works in practice. AI is often represented in a circular model containing several phases. The 4-D model is most commonly connected to AI (Bushe, 2012). Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) described

the 4-D model as consisting of the following four phases: (a) discovery, (b) dream, (c) design, and (d) destiny (p. 16). Figure 2 illustrates an Appreciative Inquiry 4-D model.

First, participants discover the organization's positive attributes (Ludema et al., 2009). Next, participants engage in conversations about their discoveries and dream about possibilities for the future grounded in past and present strengths and successes (Watkins et al., 2011). Then, participants engage in dialogue about the future and create vision statements and design essential action steps to achieve their desired future (Ludema et al., 2009). Finally, participants commit to the destiny of the organization by pledging action in support of realizing their collectively imagined future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

Figure 2

Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Model



From *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (2nd ed.), by D. Whitney and A. Trosten-Bloom, 2010, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. Copyright 2010 by McGraw-Hill. Adapted with permission.

As indicated in Figure 2, participants pass through the four phases beginning with discovery and upon reaching the destiny phase, they may continue their inquiry by beginning anew with the discovery phase depending on the participants' desires. Individual phases merit further investigation for a complete examination of AI.

Discovery. Discovery is the first phase in the AI 4-D model. The purpose of this phase is to inquire, highlight, and learn about the best in the organization and its members (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Ludema et al., 2009; Watkins et al., 2011). This inquiry into the positive attributes and performances begins with the appreciative inquiry interview. Watkins et al. (2011) explained the interview questions are developed to focus participants' dialogue and thoughts onto highpoint experiences and performances. While these questions can be individualized, they generally focus on the following areas: (a) best experiences, (b) core values, (c) generative condition or life giving factors, and (d) three wishes (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, pp. 425-426; Watkins et al., 2011, pp. 155-156). Using these questions, participants engage in paired interviews and hold affirmative conversations about the organization's strengths and wishes for the future (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

During the discovery phase, it is vital for participants to share personal narratives about successes and excellent experiences (Calabrese et al., 2010; Grant & Humphries, 2006). Also, Bushe (2001) underscored the importance of listening in addition to sharing personal stories. He revealed that when participants listen to others' stories they have the potential to identify with other participants, which in turn, facilitates collective dreaming. Clearly, the sharing of stories or personal narratives is important because it highlights the existing capacity of the organization to transform itself into its desired future (Calabrese

et al., 2007). In summary, during the discovery phase, participants utilize AI interviews to guide inquiry into the best of the organization and its members. Through this inquiry, participants discover excellent performances and strengths as they listen and share personal stories. Additionally, participants begin to discuss the future of the organization framed positively in the form of strengths and wishes.

Dream. During the dream phase, participants inspired by past and present excellence and spurred by wishes revealed during the AI interviews, begin to dream about future possibilities. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) explained that participants use information gathered during the discovery phase to create a dream about future possibilities. The purpose of the dream phase is to challenge the status quo by inviting participants to imagine a new future based on the organization's positive attributes and performances (Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Finegold et al. (2002) suggested the use of positive past stories is a key difference between AI and other visioning processes. Watkins et al. (2011) and Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) provided an additional detail about AI's visioning process. They opined that AI is different from other visioning or planning processes, because images of the future are grounded in the generative possibilities of past excellence. Therefore, it is vital for participants to engage in dialogue about past experiences as a source of information to inspire collective dreaming about a new future (Fitzgerald et al., 2001). Coghlan et al. (2003) suggested participants may engage in a variety of exercises developed to foster thinking about future possibilities. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) highlighted some of the exercises employed to generate collective dreaming during the dream phase. They listed the following activities:

- Reflect on a focal question.
- Engage in a dream dialogue
- Clarify the collective dream.
- Creatively enact the dream.
- Determine common themes and opportunities.
- Create an opportunity map.
- (Optional) Document the dream. (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 186)

While a variety of exercises may be employed to facilitate the dreaming process, participants should listen to examples of organizational success and collectively imagine a new future through sharing their hopes and dreams (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Design. During the design phase, participants develop statements capturing future possibilities and develop plans for realizing their desired future. The purpose of the design phase is to construct the social architecture necessary to realize the imagined future developed during the dream phase (Ludema et al., 2009; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Ludema et al. (2009) described social architecture as "norms, values, structures, strategies, systems, patterns of relationships, and ways of doing things" (p. 11). During the creation of the social architecture, participants identify specific activities and examine all aspects of the organization in an effort to realize their new future (McKenzie, 2003). Coghlan et al. (2003) explained, "Participants propose strategies, processes and systems; make decisions; and develop collaborations that will create and support positive change" (p. 11). These important decisions require participants to engage in dialogue and collaboration (Ludema et al., 2009).

In addition to making key decisions about the social architecture, participants also develop possibility statements or provocative propositions in the design phase (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Watkins et al., 2011). Calabrese et al. (2010) described a provocative proposition as, "a statement of an imagined future written in the present tense" (p. 259). Provocative propositions should capture an image or describe an organization when all its positive attributes are working in all aspects of the organization's functions (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). In summary, during the design phase participants select key strategies important to realizing their newly imagined future. Moreover, their images of the newly co-created organization are captured in powerful statements, which align current action with future desires.

Destiny. The final phase of AI entitled destiny, empowers participants to act on the provocative propositions in an effort to realize their collectively developed image of the future. Originally, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) called this phase delivery with an emphasis on implementing action plans and strategies, but after years of facilitating AI, they found delivery did not capture the full potential of this phase. They explained that in their experience, "organizational change needs to look a lot more like an inspired moment than a neatly packaged or engineered product" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 34). Similarly, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) suggested the destiny phase should empower participants to experiment with strategies and make adjustments as necessary in an effort to create new solutions rather than adhere to firm action plans for implementation. Hence, the purpose of the destiny phase is for participants to dialogue about and explore strategies and plans in order to realize the organization's imagined

future, which was co-created in the dream phase (Coghlan et al., 2003; Watkins et al., 2011).

While inspired action is vital during the destiny phase, Calabrese et al. (2010) and McKenzie (2003) also understood the importance of individual commitment. Calabrese et al. explained the first three phases of AI are easily embraced by participants, but the last phase is more difficult. Therefore, in an effort to sustain change, they sought individual action in the form of a simple commitment. Watkins et al. (2011) described simple commitments as "actions that can be easily taken, typically within one or two weeks and are within the existing authority and resources available to the person making the commitment" (p. 241). In summary, during the destiny phase, empowered participants show their commitment to realizing their future goals for the organization through implementing, improvising, and continuously learning.

In summary, while the previous sections endeavor to describe the AI 4-D cycle, it is important to note AI methodology is improvisational allowing for varying approaches to data collection and activities to engage participants. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) explained AI has endless variations and is not fixed to an established methodology. They posited, "each Appreciative Inquiry is a new creation, an experiment that brings out the best of human organizing" (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 13). Watkins et al. (2011) provided an example of the variability of AI methodology. They proposed a 5-D model, adding a phase called definition. In the definition phase, Watkins et al. explained participants define their inquiry goals and frame questions. Although AI methodology is improvisational with a variety of approaches (i.e. 4D, 5D, SOARs), which offers organizations flexibility in data collection and activities to engage

participants, its philosophical principles remain static no matter the variation in the methodology. While AI is flexible, an examination of the four phases of the 4-D model is fundamental for developing an understanding of AI methodology.

Appreciative Inquiry in Education

While AI has been used in other sectors extensively, it only recently has been applied to education (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). The introduction of AI in education appears to be a reaction to current accountability movements in education. Daly, Millhollen and DiGuilio (2007) explained that accountability reform mandates tend to pressure schools to focus on and remediate weaknesses, while failing to acknowledge schools' successes. In reaction to this pressure to solve problems, Daly et al. (2007) proposed employing a strength-based approach to school change. Similarly, McKenzie (2003) opined that national and state level accountability demands are an important challenge for schools developing strategic plans. Like Daly et al., McKenzie presented AI as an alternative approach to strategic planning rather than a problem-solving approach. Clearly, educators facing accountability mandates focused primarily on weaknesses are beginning to look for alternative approaches to producing change rather than simply subscribing to ubiquitous problem-solving approaches.

School leaders play a vital role in planning and implementing change. Recognizing the importance of school leadership in the change process, Evans, Thornton, and Usinger (2012) suggested AI to school leaders as a theory of change. They posited that many initiatives in education such as *No Child Left Behind* require school leaders to understand and implement complex change. To this end, Evans et al. opined AI can offer

school leaders, who often employ individualistic approaches to change, a theory to ground their approach to change. In summary, AI offers school leaders facing waves of accountability, a theory to guide them in positive change.

Appreciative inquiry as an approach to change at the school district level. Several researchers (e.g., Dickerson, 2012; Dickerson & Helm-Stevens, 2011; Filleul & Rowland, 2006) have studied the application of AI in the Vancouver School District located in British Colombia. The Vancouver School District completed planning in 2003-2004 and sustained and refined it the following year (Filleul & Rowland, 2006). As part of this planning process, the school district decided to use AI in the fall of 2005 to examine the district's core purpose and to align its roles and functions in an effort to create a focus on learning. This AI process became known as the *Learning and Development Initiative*. The initiative occurred at 12 elementary schools, seven secondary schools, three adult learning centers, and involved one district group. Filluel and Rowland, using a case study approach, found AI empowered the majority of participants. They explained that AI's methodology, focusing on the positive attributes and experiences, created positive feelings and led to the sharing of positive stories and dialogue. Also, Filleul and Rowland revealed participants focused on what was working in the school district and discussed ways to move the organization in a positive direction. Additionally, they found AI's methodology fostered the development of relationships and allowed all participants to contribute to discussions, thus offering a variety of perspectives. As a result of this AI process, the Vancouver School District identified the importance of a variety of relationships to student learning. Specifically, the AI process identified (a) teacher student relationships, (b) relationships between adult learning

centers, secondary schools, and elementary schools, and (c) teacher community connections as important relationships to develop in order to support student learning (Filleul & Rowland, 2006, p. 6). As a result of the district-level AI process, some schools developed plans to realize the full benefit of these relationships (Filleul & Rowland, 2006). In closing, Filleul and Rowland posited that human systems tend to grow in the direction of their inquiry and that in the Vancouver School District, "AI has created environment of hope and expectations" (p. 7).

Dickerson and Helm-Stevens (2011) employed a case study approach to study the use of AI in building a collaborative culture in the Vancouver School District about the same time as Filluel and Rowland (2006) reported on AI in the district. It is unclear if Dickerson and Helm-Stevens examined the same AI process as Filluel and Rowland or a follow-up application of AI in the Vancouver School District. It is clear that Dickerson and Helm-Steven looked specifically at AI's contributions to building a collaborative culture rather than the outcome(s) of the AI process. They explained that during the winter and spring of 2006, the school district completed the discovery phase of AI over a few weeks and then completed the remaining three phases in a two-day AI Summit. Over 100 participants including parents, students, teachers, administrators, support staff and district personnel attended the summit. Dickerson and Helm-Stevens found the AI process generated new connections amongst participants. They also discovered AI facilitated the building of a collaborative culture by: (a) offering participants the relational space, time and purpose to collaborate, (b) encouraging reflection on learning and sharing of values, (c) bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, and (d) supplying energy and creating a sense of permission for action (Dickerson & Helm-

Stevenson, 2011, p. 69). Overall, Dickerson and Helm-Stevens concluded AI has the capacity to build collaborative relationships. While Dickerson and Helm-Stevens uncovered the positive benefits of applying AI, they also warned additional longitudinal studies of the AI process are necessary to ascertain the sustainability of the relationships and their effects on school improvement.

AI has also been employed by school districts in the United States to produce change. Calabrese et al. (2010) used a case study approach to study a change initiative in a rural school district in the Midwest. In an effort to stem declining enrollment and growing cynicism amongst teachers and administrators, the school superintendent contacted a group of researchers to complete an AI process in the school district. The superintendent selected nine participants who engaged in all phases of AI. Calabrese et al. studied the AI process and triangulated their findings using observations, field notes, and recordings. They found the following:

- Sharing personal narratives featuring participants' positive actions and experiences produced greater respect and value for strengths and assets.
- As participants shared personal narratives, the culture transformed from defensive to collaborative, marking an increase in mutual respect.
- Collaboration between the school district and community agencies produced an increase in social capital. (Calabrese et al., 2010, pp. 261-262)

Additionally, Calabrese et al. recognized a substantial shift from a state of powerlessness to a state of powerfulness. They posited that AI served as a catalyst for this substantial change in the culture of the school and community.

In a school similar to the one featured in Calabrese et al. (2010), Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) studied the changes in school climate and trust following the application of AI in a small urban school district in the Midwest. They described the school district as beleaguered after years declining enrollment and attempts to improve their academic performance without success. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran completed a longitudinal study lasting for two years, which examined the changes in the school district following the application of AI. They administered a climate and trust survey to 147 teachers 12 months before the AI intervention. Next, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran explained that during the AI summit two innovation teams used AI to identify and plan initiatives in each of the following areas: (a) student achievement and success, (b) trust and respect, and (c) community pride and involvement (p. 433). As a result of the AI summit, the innovation teams identified and proposed a number of initiatives for each area. Then, 12 months following the AI intervention, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran administered the same survey to 124 teachers. The survey measured the following eight variables: (a) academic press, (b) teacher professionalism, (c) organizational citizenship behaviors, (d) faculty trust in principal, (e) collegial leadership, (f) faculty trust in colleagues, (g) faculty trust in students and parents, and (h) community engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 441). Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran found significant improvement in six of the eight variables with only community engagement and faculty trust in students and parents remaining relatively unchanged. While this study showed the potential of AI to improve school climate and trust, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran highlighted the complexity of educational research in schools. They

explained there were additional innovations occurring during this study, therefore, it would be difficult to identify AI as the sole intervention. Notwithstanding this caveat, Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran provided empirical evidence of a correlation between AI and improvements in school climate and trust.

West Springfield Public Schools in Massachusetts employed AI as a method to complete strategic planning, making it one of the first public schools to elect to use AI as a nontraditional approach to strategic planning (McKenzie, 2003). Facing many of the same concerns about accountability as other schools, West Springfield Public Schools chose a positive approach to strategic planning rather than a traditional problem-solving approach commonly employed in most schools (McKenzie, 2003). Using a case study approach, she described the process at West Springfield and reported relevant findings. Since West Springfield was one the first schools to use AI for this purpose, the school district had to learn how to apply AI in an educational setting. Therefore, the school district formed a core team consisting of community members and district employees to learn about AI (McKenzie, 2003). Following a year of study, West Springfield Public Schools held a two day summit to create their strategic plan. The participants identified the following core values: (a) learning through relevance and fun, (b) educating for excellence, (c) appreciating a mind at a time, (d) respecting each other, and (e) nurturing responsibility (McKenzie, 2003, p. 38). These core values became influential in driving the school district's educational mission. Additionally, many schools within the district implemented activities to realize the core values. Hence, McKenzie identified AI's ability to align action with vision. Also, she summarized a potential limitation for using AI in an educational setting. Federal and state departments of education recommend

scientifically-based programs producing quantitative data. To this end, McKenzie suggested AI tends to be a qualitative approach, resulting in a potential limitation for using AI in an educational setting.

Appreciative inquiry as an approach to change at the building level. In addition to applying AI as an approach to change at the school district level, AI has also been employed at the building level. The Heathside School in the outskirts of London is a community secondary school consisting of 1350 secondary students ranging in age from 11 to 18. Price, Scully, and Willoughby (2007) provided a case study of AI at the Heathside School. They reported that Heathside used AI for six years and integrated AI into strategic planning. Their case study focused on the school's application of AI in the creation of the Sixth Form; and AI's role in school improvement and meeting the demands of government inspections. Also, they revealed that this AI process was the result of a collaborative effort between students and faculty. Price et al. explained this application of AI produced short, medium, and long-term plans, which were all incorporated as parts of the school's strategic plan. Additionally, the AI process produced meaningful data, involved many stakeholders over a short period of time, and was economical accruing few expenses (Price et al., 2007). Moreover, Price et al. confirmed AI's capacity as a tool for self-evaluation, citing government inspectors' comments about AI's potential to involve the whole school in planning.

Willoughby and Tosey (2007) employed a case study methodology to examine AI as a school improvement method. The study occurred in a secondary school in the outskirts of London with the pseudonym "Meadfield." The school consisted of secondary students ranging in age from 11 to 18. Willoughby and Tosey noted that their

study followed a pilot study where AI was used to create the Sixth Form. The pilot study produced a positive experience, so the school elected to use AI with the entire school in an effort to enhance its future. The AI process lasted for two months and involved 275 volunteers. Willoughby and Tosey studied this process focusing their research on the following questions:

- What were the participants' reactions to, and experiences of, the AI?
- What appeared to be significant features and outcomes of the AI for the school?
- What could be learnt from the AI about school improvement? (p. 505)

Willoughby and Tosey reported that AI produced images of the future and over 200 ideas and wishes, which have led to changes at "Meadfield." Additionally, their evaluation of AI resulted in the following three main themes: (a) students and staff participating in the AI summits were inspired and generated ideas, (b) AI produced data about the culture and learning environment of the school, and (c) AI is a collaborative and participatory process (Willoughby & Tosey, 2007).

While Willoughby and Tosey believed AI can yield positive benefits for school improvement, they also presented several other aspects of AI for consideration. They explained AI is not apolitical; therefore, leaders must be cognizant of the potential outcomes of their decisions when exercising power. Willoughby and Tosey provided an example of choosing participants as a leadership decision with potential ramifications for the AI process. To this end, Willoughby and Tosey called for additional evaluations of AI.

Appreciative inquiry as a research method in education. In addition to using AI at the district and building levels, AI is also used as a research methodology in education. Presented as an embedded case study, Calabrese et al. (2007) used AI to discover the positive core and create a vision for improving at-risk students' achievement at a high school and middle school. The AI process consisted of 22 participants including principals, assistant principals, teachers, and counselors. During the study, they used surveys, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews to collect and triangulate their data. Using AI, Calabrese et al. found the following five findings:

- Teachers make a difference when they play a role in the lives of students.
- Teachers have positive experiences working with at-risk students.
- Teachers have positive experiences working with parents of at-risk students.
- Teachers and administrators want to increase at-risk students' motivation.
- Teachers and administrators need to show care and compassion. (pp. 282-286)

Calabrese et al. explained their findings demonstrate AI's ability to study at-risk students from a perspective of strengths rather than a deficit perspective. This is important because the change in teachers' perspective from deficits to strengths has the potential to develop new relationships between teachers and at-risk students (Calabrese et al., 2007). While the researchers illuminated AI's potential in education; they also highlighted the need for additional work in order to better understand AI's "incorporation into educational research efforts" (Calabrese et al., 2007, p. 288).

Glasgow (2008) employed AI in her dissertation studying the positive core of teachers working in a low social economic status school that met Kansas' Standard of Excellence. The study occurred in an elementary school in Kansas with a high

percentage of at-risk students due to their low social economic status. The process occurred over two days with 25 participants including teachers, special education teachers, and a reading specialist. Glasgow gathered data using appreciative interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant created documents. The dissertation revealed five findings about the positive core of teachers working in the elementary school with a high percentage of socially economic students. Overall, Glasgow exhorted the benefits of applying AI in an educational setting. She asserted that AI offers schools wishing to meet demands for accountability a way to discover teachers' successful experiences and necessary conditions for sustaining and extending best practice. AI offers a methodology to learn about organizational strengths and important conditions necessary to sustain and extend those strengths into other areas.

Steyn (2009) used AI to study teachers' perceptions of professional development in Invitational Education and its implementation in the United States and Hong Kong. The study consisted of 16 participants who previously participated in a quantitative study on the same topic. It should be noted that Steyn only used the first three phases of AI. Steyn explained that employing AI reveals intent to seek participants' positive experiences. Using the discovery phase of AI, Steyn was able find the best practices occurring in Invitational Education, and the roles of leaders and teachers. During the dream and design phases, participants provided insight into strategies for schools considering implementing Invitational Education. This study revealed AI's capacity as a methodology to collect information and inform future practice in education.

Returning to the Vancouver School District, Dickerson (2012) employed a case study approach to study the emergence of leadership during an appreciative inquiry

initiative. In addition to the previously mentioned benefits of AI in the Vancouver School District, Dickerson found AI created space for participants to emerge as leaders and demonstrate their leadership skills. He described participants who had the opportunity to provide input and work collaboratively with school leaders. Some participants served as site team coordinators leading groups of peers and school leaders. Also, during the AI process, participants had an opportunity to engage in dialogue about topics beyond their daily focus such as their school's vision, and to experience collaboration with diverse stakeholders. These experiences afforded participants an opportunity to examine the "big picture", consider the implementation of change, and contemplate their role in both (Dickerson, 2012). In this study, AI provided opportunities for collaboration and participation resulting in a deeper understanding of the entire organization.

Critical review of appreciative inquiry in education. AI, as a nascent approach to change in education, requires additional research. Similar to researchers studying AI in other sectors (e.g., Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Bushe, 2011), Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) advanced a need for more research of AI especially through longitudinal studies involving quantitative data. Calabrese et al. (2007) expressed a similar concern for additional research of AI. They stated, "much work remains to further our understanding of AI and its incorporation into education research efforts" (p. 288). Hence, AI as a relatively new approach in education requires additional study to fully understand its potential and limitations.

Answering the call for additional research on AI in education, Shuayb, Sharp, Judkins, and Hetherington (2009) studied the possibilities and limitations of using AI in

educational research. The researchers employed a case study approach evaluating AI in two different schools, one urban and one rural and included students ranging in age from 12 to 17. First, they trained the students in AI and then exposed them to the AI process by having the students complete an AI study in their home school. Following this experience, Shuayb et al. sent evaluation forms to the students seeking feedback and interviewed the students in an effort to better understand the limitations and possibilities of AI. They discovered AI empowered participants and provided them with a new outlook. Also, Shuayb et al. found AI has potential as an evaluative technique for identifying good practice and facilitating change. Additionally, they found AI promoted participation and promulgated a sense of ownership. In addition to these possibilities, Shuayb et al. identified some necessary conditions to support AI. They explained facilitators play an important role in training participants during the AI process. Also, they underscored the importance of commitment from all participants, especially leadership. Finally, Shuayb et al. explained "AI is not suitable for research into problematic social phenomena (such as racism), or where participants have very limited experience" (p. 14). Additionally, they suggested that when researchers borrow elements of AI, incorporating them into more traditional studies; they should acknowledge this borrowing and make clear that their studies do not represent a full implementation of AI. This study constructs a greater understanding of AI in the context of education and begins to answer calls for additional research into this nascent approach to educational change. Additionally, an examination of extant research about AI's application in education will provide further understanding of its possibilities and limitations.

In summary, the research on AI highlights its capacity to facilitate learning about the organization, foster collaboration amongst stakeholders, inspire participants to collectively imagine a new future, and develop plans for reaching their co-created images of the future. While the studies revealed AI's potential, many underscored the importance of additional research on AI in education (Calabrese et al., 2007; Dickerson & Helm-Stevens, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). Therefore, while AI offers education potential benefits, AI also requires additional research to fully understand its capacity and limitations.

Special Education

In an effort to examine AI in special education, it is important to develop an understanding of the current status of special education in the United States. Spring (2001) pointed to compulsory education laws as a key event in the history of special education. He explained these laws required students to attend school and also meant schools were required to educate students with disabilities for the first time. While public schools began to educate students with disabilities in the early 1900s, students with disabilities generally attended diverse special education settings or special classes rather than regular education classes with non-disabled peers (Osgood, 2008). This remained the status of special education until the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s served as a catalyst for change for both racial minorities and students with disabilities (Haring, McCormick, & Haring, 1994). Spring explained organized groups began to take their cases for the rights of students with disabilities to the state court systems. For example, in the late 1960s, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania resulted in a significant win for students with

disabilities, ending the practice of excluding mentally retarded children from public education (Spring, 2001). Although such court cases began to reform special education, many parents of students with disabilities and their supporters called for federal legislation to reform special education (Giordano, 2007). Their calls were answered in 1975 with the passage of Public Law 94-142, Education of All Handicapped Children Act (Giordano, 2007; Spring, 2001).

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act opened public education to students with disabilities by mandating a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all handicapped students (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Haring et al., 1994; Wagner & Katsiyannis, 2010; Yell & Drasgow, 2010). Haring et al. suggested the current status of special education was created essentially by law, referring to P.L. 94-142. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act was reauthorized in 1990 as P.L. 101-476, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Osgood, 2008). Yell and Drasgow expanded on the evolution of special education law with each reauthorization. They explained that since the initial passing of P.L. 94-142, IDEA has been reauthorized several times, and with each subsequent reauthorization, the law's emphasis has changed. Originally, IDEA sought to provide FAPE to all students with disabilities. In contrast, the 2004 reauthorization focused on results and accountability (Yell & Drasgow, 2010). Yell, Shriner and Katsiyannis (2006) revealed the influence of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. They explained NCLB, establishing accountability for all students, had a profound effect on students with disabilities, since NCLB examined adequate yearly progress, and graduation and dropout rates for students with disabilities. Additionally, IDEA influenced by NCLB requires

students with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent possible in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). The current status of special education is heavily connected to the accountability movement initiated by NCLB (Yell et al., 2006) and regulated by IDEA, requiring public schools to provide students with disabilities with FAPE and to educate them to the maximum extent possible in the LRE (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Yell and Katsiyannis (2004) explained that students with disabilities should be educated in the general education classroom, and if the general education classroom is not appropriate, students with disabilities should be educated in an environment with the least amount of segregation from non-disabled students. Giangreco (2007) explicated that IDEA of 2004 presumes the first option for placement for students with disabilities is the regular education classroom no matter the disability. Also, Rueda, Gallego and Moll (2000) provided additional insight further exposing the complexity of LRE. They reported that the student's education, "is to be individualized and appropriate to the child's needs" (p. 70). Therefore, LRE extends beyond placement considerations including discussions about specialized services and individualized education. Expanding on this idea, Giangreco explained that students with disabilities are entitled to supplementary aids and services as well as individualized goals in the regular education classroom. Conner and Ferrib (2007) suggested that IDEA created a paradox in special education. While IDEA accomplished its goal of increasing access to public education for students with disabilities through its LRE requirement, it also ensures them an individualized education. This paradox often produces disputes between school districts and parents

about the placement of students with disabilities, resulting in ligation in court systems (Weber, 2001). Schools must plan and coordinate services to avoid potential ligation and ensure an optimal educational experience for students with disabilities. While LRE only represents one of special education's many components, it reveals the complexity of special education. In summary, this brief examination of educating students in the LRE and the history of special education exposes the intricacies and challenges in special education, emphasizing the importance of coordination and planning.

Appreciative Inquiry in Special Education

AI may offer a potential framework for planning in special education. As presented earlier, strategic planning research studies in general, and specifically in education, is sparse requiring additional work (Boyne & Gould-Williams, 2003; Bryson, 2004; Hambright & Diamantes, 2004b; Huang, 2006; Kuerns & Scurpino, 1996). While strategic planning in special education is mandated in some states such as the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, there is very little research on planning in special education. To understand AI's potential as a method for developing strategic plans in special education, it is critical to examine its extant usage in special education.

The Growing Talent for Inclusion Project was studied to assess its perceived impact and effectiveness (Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006). The project, with AI embedded, attempted to improve the social dynamics of classrooms. The study occurred in four different primary and secondary classrooms in three different schools. Additionally, the study involved 76 students and four teachers. Doveston and Keenaghan employed a mixed method approach. They collected qualitative data via semi-structured interviews and quantitative data through rating scales, surveys, and observations. They

found AI's focus on strengths produced improvement in working relationships. Student feedback showed increased appreciation for their strengths and a greater sense of inclusion. Teachers also provided positive feedback. Moreover, the quantitative data supported the students' and teachers' qualitative feedback. In addition to examining the effectiveness of the Growing Talent for Inclusion Project, Doveston and Keenaghan discussed the utility of AI. They explained AI has the ability to change discourse from negative to positive, offering a new lens to examine social inclusion. In this study, teacher and student discourse shifted from negative to positive by focusing on strengths rather than deficits. To this end, Doveston and Keenaghan opined that AI, with its focus on identifying strengths rather than problems, has the potential to transform classroom dynamics.

AI as a method to examine secondary inclusion was studied by Kozik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, and Black (2009) during a single day event. The AI process lasted five and a half hours and started with the discovery phase and ended with the delivery (destiny) phases. The question explored in the AI process was, "In order for inclusive adolescent education to be successful, what values, skills, and knowledge should teachers demonstrate?" (Kozik et al., 2009, p. 77). Thirty-five participants from higher education, school districts, state department of education, and technical support networks considered social inclusion in an effort to answer the proposed question. The AI process produced a wealth of information and led to the production of four provocative propositions and plans for promoting successful adolescent inclusion. Additionally, participants made commitments to action over the next three and six months. Kozik et al. opined that AI does not result in a traditional action plan, because participants are empowered to act

through the process rather than the plan. They explained, in AI, action plans are informal and left open for future possibilities. Additionally, they suggested AI is ideal for promoting inclusive practices because: (a) AI utilizes strength-based understanding, (b) involves participants personally and intimately in the change process, (c) develops a change design based on acknowledging the past and understanding the present, and (d) provides accountability through personal commitment (Kozik et al., 2009, p. 89). Kozik et al.'s findings provide insight into AI's capacity to learn about social inclusion, produce plans for the future of social inclusion, and involve a variety of stakeholders in a time efficient process.

The efficacy of the Circle of Friends Program was studied by Calabrese et al. (2008). This program sought to increase social inclusion of students with disabilities by pairing students with disabilities with non-disabled peers referred to as buddies. Calabrese et al. employed a qualitative approach using AI. The participants consisted of ten sponsors, eight former buddies, and ten parents hailing from six schools and four school districts. Calabrese et al. collected data using focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey. Their rationale for choosing AI is revealed in their two assumptions about the Circle of Friends Program. They hypothesized that parents would report positive personal experiences working with the Circle of Friends. Also, they believed that sponsors and buddies would report a positive impact on all stakeholders involved in the program. Expecting positive information about the program, Calabrese et al. chose AI to inquire about the program. Using AI, they found evidence supporting the efficacy of the Circle of Friends Program. In this study, AI was used as a research methodology to expose participants' positive experiences and transformational change

realized through the Circle of Friends Program. Calabrese et al. demonstrated AI's potential as a research methodology to study educational and social programs.

Kozik (2009) used a case study approach to study the implementation of an interview protocol for individualized education plan (IEP) meetings. He explained that the interview protocol was produced as a result of a mandated professional development in a school district using AI to focus on improving student achievement. There were 35 participants in the AI process including special education teachers, school psychologists, school social workers, a chairperson, teaching assistants, and secretaries. During the AI process, the special education department generated numerous ideas for improving special education services in addition to the IEP interview protocol. The following IEP interview protocol was grounded in AI and asked the following questions:

- To the student: Tell us about some of your successes this year.
- To the parent: What successes have you seen your child enjoy this year?
- To the teachers and specialists: What success have you seen for this student?
- To the group: What suggestions or changes can you think of to make this student's program work even better?
- To the student: What do you think you'd most love to do when you grow up?
- To the student: What do you think you'll need to do to get to do what you love most?
- To the student: What have you done so far to get to do what you love most (to move toward that goal)?

- To the group: What kinds of support and help can you provide to make this student's program work toward the goal he/she has set for himself/herself? (Kozik, 2009, pp. 21-22)

Kozik found that the interview protocol encouraged intergenerational dialogue during IEP meetings. He also reported that the interview protocol grounded in AI changed the power structure of IEP meetings by shifting the focus of the meeting onto the student as a member of the team. Kozik explained that this shift in focus diminished concerns relative to the power of individual IEP team members. To this end, Kozik opined that AI has the ability to level the playing field and produce collaboration in IEP meetings.

In summary, the research on AI in special education has revealed AI's capacity as a change process. In accordance with the extant research, AI has the ability to shift discourse from negative to positive by focusing on strengths rather than on deficits. Moreover, the research elucidates AI's ability to produce strategic learning by gathering information about the past and present of programs. Additionally, the research shows AI's capacity to develop plans to guide future change. Finally, AI in special education demonstrates the capacity to involve diverse stakeholders resulting in the development of personal commitment to the future of programs.

Summary

There is educational literature postulating the benefits of strategic planning as a methodology for dealing with change. In addition to dealing with change, the literature on strategic planning offers organizations increased performance through better planning, the promotion of strategic management, and the ability to align decisions with clients' needs. Moreover, literature specifically on strategic planning in education underscores

the importance of engaging stakeholders in the strategic planning process. Therefore, public schools facing enormous challenges such as accountability and budgetary constraints may benefit greatly from strategic planning. Thus, research into alternative approaches to strategic planning, such as AI, may offer public schools additional approaches to engaging stakeholders, fostering strategic management, creating mission statements, developing action plans, and inspiring stakeholder commitment to the realization of the strategic plans. Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning offer a theoretical pattern for examining AI's capacity as a strategic planning practice. Therefore, additional research into AI, examining its ability to meet Bryson's predictions for the future of strategic planning, may offer further insight into AI's efficacy as a strategic planning approach.

This literature review demonstrates AI's potential as an approach to organizational change and/or research methodology. The research exhibits AI's capacity to facilitate learning about an organization, capturing not only its strengths, but its desired future in the form of wishes. Additionally, the research reveals AI's ability to foster collaboration and produce participation from diverse stakeholders. The literature review also underscores AI's capacity to engage participants in collectively imagining a new future for their organization as well as developing plans aligning current actions with their future visions of the organization. Finally, the research demonstrates AI's adeptness to create a sense of positivity amongst participants contemplating potentially debilitating issues. In summary, the review of research indicates AI has the potential to produce strategic learning, thinking, and acting as well as the ability to engage diverse stakeholders in positive thinking and action. While the research indicates some potential

for AI as an approach to strategic planning, additional research is necessary to better understand AI's full potential in the context of education.

This literature review provides insight into AI's capacity as well as elucidates the limited amount of research on AI in education. Additional research is necessary to understand AI's potential as an approach to strategic planning. Fortunately, Bryson's predictions for the future of strategic planning provide guidelines for which to compare AI's ability to plan strategically. Moreover, additional research into stakeholders' experience and perceptions may offer further insight into AI's capacity to engage stakeholders in the development of strategic plans. Hopefully, this research exploring the special education subcommittee's work using AI to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school, may have offered other public schools valuable information about AI as an approach to completing strategic planning.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

The purpose of this study was to examine Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as an approach to developing strategic plans for special education in a public school. The study was embedded in a school district's strategic planning process and drew on the information derived from a subcommittee focusing on developing strategic plans for special education as a source of data for examining AI as a method for strategic planning. Additionally, the study determined participant experiences and perceptions of AI immediately following the strategic planning effort in order to develop an explicit understanding of what participants experienced and how they perceived AI as a method for strategic planning. The data gathered throughout the strategic planning effort and immediately following it was used to investigate how closely the actual strategic planning effort using AI mirrored the philosophical principles of AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Watkins et al., 2011) as well as Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning. Chapter three will detail the precise procedures and methodology employed during this study.

Research Questions

This study examined AI as an approach to developing strategic plans for special education in a public school and sought to answer the following four questions:

1. How do plans for special education emerge as participants engage in the four phases of appreciative inquiry during strategic planning for the future of special education in a public school district?

2. What were participants' experiences and perceptions of appreciative inquiry as a method to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school district?
3. To what extent did participants' experiences using appreciative inquiry mirror the philosophical principles of appreciative inquiry?
4. To what extent did using appreciative inquiry to develop strategic plans align with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning in the next decade?

Discussion of Methodology

The methodology in this study represented an application of descriptive mixed method case study in an effort to study AI, which is also a research methodology (Reed, 2007). Yin (2009) explained that it is important for researchers to make some key decisions before engaging in case study methodology. One such key decision requires researchers to decide between the various theories of case study methodology (i.e. exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory) in order to specify their approach. This case study was grounded in descriptive theory since the study endeavored to describe how plans emerged from the strategic planning effort as well as participants' experiences and perceptions of AI (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Yin, 2009). A descriptive mixed method case study offered the flexibility to answer the study's research questions as participants used AI to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in their public school district.

Yin (2009) and Huberman and Miles (2002) revealed that researchers must make decisions about how many cases will be used during a study before employing case study

methodology. This study examined a single case of a subcommittee for special education in the strategic planning process formed to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school district. The unit of analysis for this case was the subcommittee, consisting of 12 participants including one participant researcher. There were two rationales for selecting a single case. Yin and Stake (1995) underscored that a single case is appropriate when it represents a unique case that offered me the opportunity to learn more about a phenomenon. Since, AI has only recently migrated to education from other sectors (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007), and there have been very few opportunities to study it in education, especially as a method for strategic planning in a public school, the single case selected for this study offered me a unique opportunity to examine AI as an approach to strategic planning. In particular, this case examined strategic planning for special education, adding further to the uniqueness of this case. Yin explained that "a single case meeting all of the conditions for testing the theory, can confirm, challenge, or extend the theory" (p. 47). Because, AI's underlining theory was well-developed, it was possible that this single case could have confirmed, challenged or extended the appropriateness of AI theory and methodology as a strategic planning method in schools. The descriptive case study approach employed to examine the single case selected for this study may have exposed important insights about AI theory and methodology as it relates to using AI as a method for strategic planning in the context of education.

In addition to the descriptive case study methodology, this study employed a mixed method approach in an effort to collect stronger evidence about participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning. The study utilized

a parallel mixed model as described by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), who recommended collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in order to discern findings from the data. In this study, I employed a survey to collect quantitative data and a focus group aligned with the survey to collect qualitative data. The survey instrument is provided in Appendix D and the focus group interview guide is provided in Appendix E. Thus, as described by Creswell (2009), this mixed method approach allowed me to address the complex issue of participants' experiences and perceptions by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data rather than relying solely on data collected through quantitative or qualitative approaches alone.

Although the overall methodology for this study was a descriptive mixed methods case study, it is important to recognize that this study examined AI, which is itself a variation of action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). In order to answer the research questions, participants had to pass through the four phases of AI, closely following AI methodology and its embedded data collection and analysis techniques. As a result, there was considerable overlap between the data collection and analysis techniques of AI and the descriptive mixed methods case study methodology. In summary, this study employed a descriptive mixed method case study to answer the research questions focusing on AI as a method for strategic planning in special education.

Participants

This study was embedded in a school district's strategic planning process. It is important to recognize the political forces at play when completing research within your own organization (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In the case of selecting participants for the study, I worked within the boundaries of the organization by collaborating with the

assistant superintendent who had the authority to determine the number of participants from the various stakeholder groups that could participate in the subcommittee for special education. The following sections provide a description of who participated and how they were selected to participate.

Regular education teachers. The assistant superintendent sent an email to the local education association soliciting volunteers to participate in the district's strategic planning effort. In turn, the local education association emailed its membership, seeking volunteers to serve as participants. As a result of this email, the local education association generated a list of volunteers for the assistant superintendent. I met with the assistant superintendent to discuss the types of participants necessary for completing the study. I informed the assistant superintendent that a regular education teacher from each of the district's three building levels i.e. elementary, middle, and high schools was appropriate since they could offer the subcommittee on special education a regular education teacher's perspective from each building. The assistant superintendent assigned three regular education teachers from the local education association's list of volunteers to participate in the subcommittee on special education. Once the assistant superintendent provided me with the regular education teachers' names, I contacted each regular education teacher to provide an informed consent form and solicit agreement to participate in the study.

Special education teachers. Special education teachers were selected and assigned to the subcommittee following the same method used for selecting regular education teachers. I explained to the assistant superintendent that one special education teacher from each building would provide the subcommittee on special education with a

special education teacher's perspective from each building. The assistant superintendent assigned three special education teachers to the subcommittee for special education. I contacted each teacher to provide an informed consent form and solicit agreement to participate in the study.

District's act 93 group members. In addition to special and regular education teachers, members of the district's Act 93 group, which refers to the administrative bargaining unit, were also assigned to the subcommittee for special education. The Act 93 group consists of district administrators such as assistant principals, principals, directors, and the school psychologist. I met with the assistant superintendent to discuss the selection of administrators for participation in the study. I suggested one member of the Act 93 group from each building to provide an administrative perspective from each building. The assistant superintendent assigned three Act 93 members to the subcommittee for special education and provided me the names. After receiving the list of names, I contacted each participant to provide an informed consent form and solicit agreement to participant in the study.

Parents of students with disabilities. Parents of students with disabilities were also invited to participate in the strategic planning effort. I asked each special education department in the three school buildings to meet and identify which parents would likely participate in the strategic planning effort. Following the department meetings, I asked the special education teacher representing each building on the subcommittee for special education to develop a list of parents' names, numbered one to three, with number one being the parent most likely to participate. Upon receiving the lists of names, I contacted the first person on each list and asked them to participate in the strategic planning effort

and provided them with an informed consent form. I secured the participation of one parent who has a student with a disability from each building to participate in the study.

Participant researcher. I was the final participant, serving as both the researcher and director of special education. It is important to note that my position was that of an insider with well-established relationships and extensive knowledge of the organization's culture (Reed, 2007). I also possessed the highest hierarchical position within the subcommittee, therefore, it was possible that while I have considerable access to organizational information, I may not have had full access to informal information shared amongst participants (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In an effort to lessen any negative affects created due to my insider status, I carefully articulated my agenda (Stringer, 2007). Also, I considered my stance and worked to encourage other participants to view me as a participant rather than an expert or supervisor (Stringer, 2007). I respected the ideas of other participants rather than arguing for one perspective over another (Stringer, 2007). At any rate, it is important to note my position relative to the subcommittee for special education.

At the time of data collection, I was the director of special education with only one year of service in that position. Previously, I served the district as a campus principal for four years. As the director of special education, I supervised all aspects of special education across the entire school district. I was also a parent of a student with a disability. My daughter was a 7th grader at the middle school who has received special education services since 4th grade. In summary, I was both the director of special education and a parent of a student with a disability.

The subcommittee for special education consisted of three regular education teachers, three special education teachers, three administrators who were members of the district's act 93 group, two parents of students with disabilities and a participant researcher who was also a member of the district's act 93 group and a parent of a student with a disability.

Appreciative inquiry interview participants. AI interviews are an essential component of AI methodology (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Reed, 2007). During AI interviews, participants interview other stakeholders to discover the organization's strengths and stakeholders' wishes for the future (Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). During this study, the 12 members of the subcommittee for special education conducted AI interviews with three additional stakeholders. I directed subcommittee members to conduct interviews with employees, parents, and/or community members who lived within the school district's borders and either currently had or have had direct contact with special education services. It should be noted that these stakeholders only participated in the AI interviews and did not participate in the entire study. Subcommittee members who interviewed these additional stakeholders only collected limited biographical information such as: (a) relationship with school district, (b) current building assignment for employees, (c) years of service, and (d) building location for parents or students who were currently receiving special education services. Subcommittee members did not collect any AI interview participants' names in effort to protect their identity.

Data Sources

Chapter two notes that AI has only recently migrated to education from other sectors (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). Thus, as noted in Chapter one, a major limitation of this study was the ability to field test instruments before employing them in the study. In response to this limitation, I attempted to ground instruments in research in an effort to improve validity and reliability.

Appreciative inquiry interview protocol. The AI interview protocol is a fundamental component to AI. It is commonly used in the discovery phase where participants interview each other as well as other stakeholders in an effort to discover affirmative information about themselves and their organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) expounded the importance of good AI interview questions stating, "perhaps the most discernible characteristic of our best interview questions is that they invite people to tell stories and participate at that very human level" (p. 150). AI interview protocols should discover affirmative information and facilitate group discussions. AI interview protocols should also foster thinking amongst participants about their wishes for the future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Clearly, the AI interview protocol holds an important position in AI.

The AI interview protocol employed during this study was used during the discovery phase in two different cycles. The first cycle paired subcommittee members together to use the interview protocol to interview each other and report their findings back to the entire group. While individual participants reported their findings derived

from the AI interview protocols, other subcommittee members identified and took notes on key ideas and themes. The AI interview protocol was also used during a second cycle of interviews. This time, subcommittee members interviewed stakeholders using the AI interview protocol and brought their findings back to the entire group. Once again, while subcommittee members reported their findings from the interviews with stakeholders, other subcommittee members identified and took notes on key ideas and themes. Since the interview protocol played a pivotal role in discovering key ideas and themes important to developing strategic plans, it is imperative to examine the instrument and its development in greater detail.

I utilized extant literature on AI as a guide to developing the AI interview protocol employed in this study. There were two primary sources that served as models for developing the AI interview protocol. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) and Watkins et al. (2011) offered exemplars of generic AI questions that could be modified for a particular context. The following example highlights the major elements of a generic AI interview protocol:

- Best experience: Tell me about the best times that you have had within your organization. What made it an exciting experience? Who was involved? Describe the event in detail.
- Values: What are the things you value deeply; specifically the things you value about yourself, your work, and your organization?
- Core life-giving factor or value: What do you think is the core life-giving factor or value of your organization?

- Three wishes: If you had three wishes for this organization, what would they be? (Watkins et al., 2011, pp. 155-156)

The AI interview protocol utilized for this study was developed based on Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran and Watkins et al. generic interview protocols.

The AI interview protocol developed for this study consisted of five sections. The first section aligned with the best experiences as identified by Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) and Watkins et al. (2011) in their respective generic interview protocols. The questions seeking answers about best experiences were as follows:

- Tell me about the best experience you have had with special education in the Will's Mountain School District. Who was involved in the experience? What made the experience positive for you?

Sections two and three of the AI interview protocol aligned with the value section of the generic interview protocols. The questions developed to discover affirmative information about values were as follows:

- Without being humble, what do you value deeply about yourself as a parent, teacher, or administrator in the Will's Mountain School District?
- What do you value about special education in the Will's Mountain School District? How has special education in the Will's Mountain School District contributed to your life?

Section four of the AI interview protocol aligned with the core life-giving factors or value as described by Watkins et al. (2011) in their generic interview protocol. The questions developed to discover core life-giving factors or values were as follows:

- What is the most important function of special education in the Will's Mountain School District? How would the Will's Mountain School District be different if special education did not exist?

Finally, section five of the AI interview protocol aligned with the three wishes section of the generic interview protocols as described by Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011) and Watkins et al. (2011) in their respective generic interview protocols. The question developed to discover participants' and stakeholders' wishes for the future of special education was as follows:

- If you had three wishes for special education in the Will's Mountain School District, what would your wishes be?

In light of the proposition that AI is new to education and that there are no opportunities to field test the instruments prior to actual application, the AI interview protocol used for this study was closely aligned with extant literature about AI in an effort to increase the instrument's validity and reliability. The AI interview protocol is provided in Appendix A.

Physical artifacts. This descriptive case study was embedded in the subcommittee for special education as it used AI as a method for strategic planning. As the subcommittee passed through the four phases of AI as described in Chapter two, they produced several physical artifacts. Yin (2009) described a physical artifact as "a technological device, a tool or instrument, a work of art, or some other physical evidence" (p. 113). I collected the following physical artifacts: (a) participants' notes, (b) participants' word walls, (c) participants' rough and final drafts of provocative propositions, and (d) participants' final drafts of action steps. In addition to the actual

physical artifacts, I took pictures of participants as they developed the physical artifacts in an effort to document the process through which participants created them.

Physical artifacts were important in this descriptive case study, because they served as evidence of the emerging strategic plans as participants engaged in AI. For example, during the discovery phase participants should discover strengths and wishes for the organization (Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Participants' notes listing the findings from the AI interviews offered insight into what participants discovered. Since, according to AI theory, the discovered strengths and wishes should serve as important organizational information upon which to develop plans for the organization's future, participants' notes provided a beginning point for the emerging plans. I collected physical artifacts from throughout the discovery, dream, and design phases to document the emergence of strategic plans for special education.

Interview guide for the focus group on simple commitments. As discussed in Chapter two, simple commitments are an important element of the destiny phase. Calabrese et al. (2010) and McKenzie (2003) recognized that during the destiny phase, participants should make commitments about how they will contribute to realizing the organization's newly developed image of the future. In AI, participants often make simple commitments, which describe actions that participants can undertake in an effort to make their new images of their organization come to life (Watkins et al., 2011). Although simple commitments play a vital role in AI, Calabrese et al. noted that while participants easily embrace the other phases of AI, they usually experience difficulty sustaining the implementation of the ideas generated throughout those phases. In response, Calabrese et al. explicitly asked participants to make public commitments as a

technique to help participants sustain implementation. With an understanding of the importance of simple commitments, I included in this study a focus group about simple commitments.

A focus group generally consists of eight to 12 participants who engage in a discussion about a particular topic under the direction of a group facilitator (Stewart et al., 2007). This focus group about simple commitments occurred during the destiny phase with subcommittee members and the researcher who will serve as the group facilitator. Stewart et al. also highlighted the importance of developing an interview guide for focus groups. I employed an interview guide to facilitate the group discussion about simple commitments.

As there were no available example interview guides previously used in research on AI in education, it was necessary to utilize extant literature about developing interview guides for focus groups. Stringer (2007) cautioned that researchers may taint questions with their own perceptions, perspectives, interests, and agendas (p. 70). To avoid tainting questions, Stringer recommended that researchers employ grand tour questions that allow participants to answer questions based on the own experiences. Stewart et al. (2007) provided some guidance for developing interview guides for focus groups. They identified the following areas for consideration: (a) formulating questions, (b) number of questions, (c) structure, (d) wording of questions, and (e) pretesting. I formulated the questions from general to more specific and with the questions relating closest to the underlying research questions at the beginning (Stewart et al., 2007). Also, I developed six questions with a clear focus on participants' commitment to realizing the organization's newly imagined future (Stewart et al., 2007). In regard to the interview

questions' structure, I created open-ended questions that allowed participants to answer freely about commitment (Stewart et al., 2007). I worded questions in a clear, neutral manner that allowed participants to understand the questions and foster open conversation amongst participants (Stewart et al., 2007). Finally, Stewart et al. and Maxwell (2013) underscored the importance of pretesting or pilot testing the interview guide on a representative population prior to employing it in a study. Chapter one identified field testing as a limitation of this study as finding a representative population, in other words, a group of individuals involved in AI in education was extremely difficult. Consequently, pretesting or pilot testing was impractical as no representative group was available.

In addition to the extant literature on developing interview guides for focus groups, I reviewed extant literature on AI in education in an effort to find an example of a previously employed interview guide upon which to ground the interview guide for this study. Unfortunately, no interview guides were found. Calabrese et al. (2010) did offer the following example question:

- What is one simple commitment to an action that you can make right now to move the provocative proposition forward tomorrow (p. 260)?

In summary, I used the information from the extant literature on developing interview guides for focus groups and the question employed by Calabrese et al. to develop the interview guide for the focus group on simple commitments. The interview guide consisted of a total of four questions. The interview guide is provided in Appendix B. Finally, it should be noted that while the interview guide offered direction for the

discussion, focus group discussions should have a natural flow, which means that participants may have deviated from the interview questions (Stewart et al., 2007).

Post appreciative inquiry survey. This study employed a parallel mixed model as described by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as a method to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school district. Tashakkori and Teddlie explained that in "parallel mixed method design quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time and analyzed in a complementary manner" (p. 47). I employed survey methodology in an effort to collect quantitative data for the purpose of generating descriptive statistics about participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning. I also employed the focus group discussed in the next section of this paper to collect qualitative data. Unfortunately, a review of extant literature did not reveal any previously developed survey instruments used to sample participants' experiences and perceptions of AI. As no pre-existing instrument was available, a new survey instrument was developed for this study.

Fowler (2009) identified the following key components of surveys: (a) sampling, (b) question design, (c) interviewing, (d) mode of data collection, and (e) total survey design (pp. 4-6). The sample for this survey was all participants who served as members of the subcommittee for special education. The limitations section of Chapter one noted that this study was not intended to be generalizable to any larger population, but rather to describe these participants' experiences and perceptions. The questions designed for this survey were closed questions meaning that participants may choose from a continuum of acceptable answers (Fowler, 2009). The survey used for this study allowed participants

to choose from the following answers: (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) neutral, (d) disagree, and (e) strongly disagree. Therefore, when participants answered the questions, they placed themselves in an ordered category along the continuum (Fowler, 2009). Interviewing was not be applicable to this survey as there is not an oral component to the survey. The mode of collection for this survey was in person as I had access to all participants immediately following the AI process.

The survey design was also closely connected to the survey's validity and reliability. As previously noted, this survey was developed for this study; therefore, its reliability was limited as it was impossible to compare its results with any previous results (Creswell, 2009). Once again, it is important to note the limited opportunities to field test instruments pertaining to AI in education due to its relatively new emergence in education. Creswell explained that validity is "whether one can draw meaningful and useful inferences from scores on the instruments" (p. 149). To improve the survey's validity as a newly developed instrument, I utilized a template to ground the survey in extant research and literature on AI. The template is provided in Appendix C. The template identified four specific areas in which to develop questions about participants' experiences and perceptions. The specific areas identified were as follows: (a) collaboration/participation, (b) identifying life-giving forces, (c) imagining a positive future/positive change, and (d) positivity. After identifying the four areas, the template then examined what participants should experience in connection with each area. Next, two survey questions were developed for each specific area in order to ascertain what participants actually experienced during the strategic planning effort using AI. Finally, the template bridged all four specific areas to ground participants' general experiences

and perceptions in extant literature and research about AI. The survey posed three questions to capture participants' general experiences and perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning. In summary, I employed a detailed template to ground the survey questions in extant literature and research about AI in an effort to improve the validity of the newly developed instrument.

The paper survey consisted of the following three sections: (a) introduction and statement about the study, (b) collection of demographic information, and (c) survey questions. Additionally, the survey contains 11 questions with potential answers arranged in a Likert scale. The survey instrument is provided in Appendix D.

Interview guide for post appreciative inquiry focus group. A parallel mixed model consists of quantitative and qualitative data that "are collected at the same time and analyzed in a complementary manner" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 47). In this study, the survey collected the quantitative data, while a focus group following the survey collected the qualitative data. Stewart et al. (2007) explicated that

> The open response format of a focus group provides an opportunity to obtain large and rich amounts of data in the respondents' own words. The researchers can obtain deeper levels of meaning, make important connections, and identify subtle nuances in expression and meaning. (p. 42)

I used a focus group in combination with the survey due to the focus group's ability to collect rich data about AI as a method for strategic planning.

I served as the group facilitator and employed an interview guide to direct the focus group. The interview guide contained five main questions with some additional

questions to probe deeply into AI. The interview guide for the post AI focus group is provided in Appendix E.

I used the template developed to ground the survey in extant literature and research as a guide upon which to form the interview guide for the focus group. The template is provided in Appendix C. Similar to the survey, I developed questions for each of the four specific areas identified in the template. The four specific areas were as follows: (a) collaboration/participation, (b) identifying life-giving forces, (c) imagining a positive future/positive change, and (d) positivity. In addition to the four specific areas, the interview guide also asked a general question about participants' perception of AI as a strategic planning process. The interview guide was complimentary to the survey in that the interview guide expanded on the survey questions and offered participants an opportunity to discuss AI in greater detail. In summary, the survey questions were closed questions with only limited options for response, whereas, the interview guide questions allowed participants to answer in their own words, describing their perspective of using AI as a method for strategic planning. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data allowed me to "address a more complicated research question and collect a richer and stronger array of evidence" (Yin, 2009, p. 63).

Data Collection

This study examined AI, which is a research methodology with its own theory and methodology (Reed, 2007). To that end, this study took advantage of the data collection process embedded in AI research methodology. I also collected additional data about participants' experiences and perceptions immediately following the study. The collection of multiple forms of data allowed me to triangulate findings (Maxwell, 2013;

Stringer, 2007; Yin, 2009). The following sections describe the data collection procedures that I employed.

Participant notes. The study began with the first session of AI called discovery. I provided informed consent by reading a statement to all participants. I also explained that participation in the study was voluntary. Following the introduction of participants, I offered information about strategic planning using AI and a schedule of strategic planning sessions. Next, I provided training on conducting AI interviews by reviewing guidelines from page 172 of the book, *Appreciative Interview: Change at the Speed of Imagination* by Watkins et al. (2011). Guidelines for conducting AI interviews from page 172 of *Appreciative Interview: Change at the Speed of Imagination* by Watkins et al. is provided in Appendix F. Following the AI interview training, I presented the interview protocol and allow the participants to read and ask questions about the protocol. Next, participants grouped in pairs of two and selected a location either inside or outside of the building to conduct AI interviews with their partners. After approximately an hour, participants regrouped in the original classroom to share their findings from the interviews. Before sharing their stories, I gave all participants note sheets and asked them to write down any important ideas and themes for developing plans for the future. Once all participants shared their findings from the interviews, I collected the participants' note sheets and interview protocols used during the AI interviews. I gave each participant three interview protocols and explained that between this session and the next, each participant should interview three stakeholders, defining stakeholders as anyone who lives in the Will's Mountain School District and has or has had contact with special education services provided by the school district.

The second session began with the continuation of the discovery phase. First, I gave each participant note sheets. Next, similar to data collection during the first session, participants shared their findings to the various AI interview questions as other participants listened and made notes about important themes and ideas for developing strategic plans. After all participants shared their reports and conversations ended, I allowed participants to take a short break before beginning the dream phase of AI.

Physical artifacts. After the short break, I explained that the first phase of AI has ended and that they would now be entering the dream phase where participants reflect on the information they discovered during the interviews and begin to dream about what special education could be in the Will's Mountain School District. Next, I had the participants choose a colored marker and explained that they could write words or draw pictures, whatever they would like to do, in an effort to dream about the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District. I also expounded that the participants could, if they wanted, group their ideas together as they wrote or drew them on the paper taped to the walls. After approximately a half an hour, participants talked about the lists, and after some discussion, moved the sheets of paper into groups. Next, I gave the subcommittee members a short break.

After the break, I asked the participants to divide into groups. Next, I explained the concept of a provocative proposition and asked each group to use their notes and word walls to craft a rough draft of a provocative proposition. I then gave each group a piece of notebook paper to write their rough drafts. After the groups finished their rough drafts, I asked each group to go to the next provocative proposition to their left, read the rough draft, and amend it as necessary on a separate piece of paper. The groups

continued with this same pattern until they arrived back at their original provocative proposition. The groups then read the final draft of the provocative proposition out loud for the entire subcommittee to discuss and change as needed. After reading, discussing, and agreeing upon all provocative propositions, the session ended with me collecting all participants' note sheets from both AI interviews, the word walls, and the provocative propositions including the rough drafts leading up to the final drafts.

The final session began with me placing the word walls and provocative propositions from the last session on the walls. I then explained that this session was the design phase of AI where participants develop action statements in an effort to align action in order to realize the provocative propositions. Next, I asked the subcommittee members to form groups consisting of two or three participants. I explained that participants would follow a similar process as used to develop the provocative propositions. Next, I gave group members markers to write on large pieces of paper hung on the walls. The participants used the previously developed word walls and provocative propositions to list ideas for action plans. After giving each group enough time to generate a list of ideas, the groups rotated to their left, read what the prior group wrote, and added their own ideas to the list. The groups continued with the same pattern until they arrived at their original set of action statements. At this point, each group read the action plans out loud and discussed the generated ideas in order to reach agreement about the final draft of the action plan. After completing the action plans, I gave the participants a break. Please note that I waited until the end of the day to take pictures and collect all word walls, provocative propositions, and action plans.

Focus group on simple commitments. After a short break, I explained that they were now in the destiny phase of AI, which involved participants making commitments to realizing the provocative propositions and action steps. I expounded that I would ask questions about commitment and participants should answer them freely. Moreover, I tape-recorded the conversation and asked participants to remember to speak up for the tape-recorder. I then asked if there are any questions. Next, I began the focus group on simple commitments. I used the interview guide and asked additional questions as needed to expand on participants' statements. At the conclusion of the focus group, I explained that following lunch, participants should return to the room to participate in a brief survey.

Post appreciative inquiry survey. After all participants returned from lunch, I reminded participants that they were helping the district plan for the future and participating in a doctorate study for the College of William and Mary. I explicated that during the strategic planning effort, participants used a relatively new process for strategic planning, and therefore, I wanted to give them a survey about their experiences and perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning. I then gave each participant a survey. After all participants completed the survey, I explained that following the school district's closing activities, the subcommittee would regroup in the same room for a focus group on their experiences and perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning.

Post appreciative inquiry focus group. After the school district's closing activities, I expounded that the focus group would offer participants an opportunity to expand on their experiences and perceptions of AI as they developed strategic plans for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District. I then asked if the

participants had any questions. Next, I tape-recorded the focus group and used the interview guide to ask questions. I also asked additional questions as necessary to clarify participants' ideas or probed topics deeper.

Data Analysis

"The analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies" (Yin, 2009, p. 127). Further compounding the issue, this case study endeavored to describe another research methodology with its own data collection and analysis techniques completed by participants as they passed through the four phases of AI (Reed, 2007). In order to accurately describe the AI process employed by participants in this case study, I was diligent not to re-analyze the data collected by subcommittee members during the AI process, but rather employ approaches that describe the AI process accurately, including participants' actual findings. This study describes two divergent phases and four research questions. The first phase occurred during the actual AI process and the second phase occurred following the process. Moreover, I employed several different techniques to analyze the data collected during the two phases in order to answer the four research questions.

The first phase of this study occurred during the AI process as participants engaged in AI as a method for strategic planning. The research question directly connected to this phase is: How do plans for special education emerge as participants engage in the four phases of appreciative inquiry during strategic planning for the future of special education in a public school district? I collected participants' notes, word walls, rough and final drafts of provocative propositions, final drafts of action steps, and a tape-recorded focus group on simple commitments. I employed the time-series

analysis, chronologies as described by Yin (2009) to analyze data collected during the first phase of the study. Yin explained that chronological sequence captures a major strength of case studies in that it "allows you to trace events over time" (p. 148). Similarly, Stake (1995) elucidated that "to the qualitative scholar, the understanding of the human experience is a matter of chronologies rather than of cause and effects" (p. 39). As described in Chapter two, AI has four phases with defined activities that should occur during each phase. Mirroring the four phases of AI, I present the evidence from each phase in an effort to describe the emergence of strategic plans.

During the discovery phase, participants took notes while listening to other participants report their findings from AI interviews conducted with other subcommittee members and stakeholders. This generated numerous participant notes, each one providing the results of the participants' individual narrative analysis. In an effort to present the participants' findings in an organized and meaningful manner, I used qualitative data analysis as described by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Maxwell (2013) to code and categorize the information found in the participants' note sheets. The process began with me segmenting the data from the participants' notes into codes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maxwell, 2013). Next, I reviewed the codes looking for commonalities within each AI interview question in an effort to develop categories across participants' notes. Once I developed categories, I identified the number of participants who listed information fitting into the various categories. Also, I reviewed the audiotape of the participants answering the AI interview questions listening for supporting qualitative data for each category. The development of categories connected to the number of participants identifying each individual category, participants' individual codes, and

qualitative data from the audiotape of participants answering the AI interview questions allowed me to identify overarching common themes and to reduce the voluminous information potentially found within participants' notes into clear and concise evidence of what participants actually found during the discovery phase.

During the dream and design phases, participants analyzed data in an effort to complete the various activities that occur during these phases of AI as described by Chapter two. During the dream phase, participants engaged in nominal group technique as they dreamed about the organization's possibilities (Reed, 2007). The process required participants to analyze their findings from their notes in an effort to identify key themes upon which to construct the future. The participants listed these key findings on word walls. Additionally, the participants analyzed all previously collected data and/or findings to develop provocative propositions and action steps. The results of these processes produced organized findings that required no further analysis for the reader. Therefore, I employed chronologies as described by Yin (2009) to present the participants' findings, which added important information necessary for the development of the descriptive case study as well as provided evidence about the emergence of the strategic plans.

Finally, commitment is a fundamental element in the destiny phase of AI (Calabrese et al., 2010). I collected data about commitment by tape recording a focus group where participants discussed their commitment to realizing the newly developed strategic plans. Qualitative data analysis was used to analyze the contents of the focus group. First, I transcribed the focus group, creating a verbatim transcript of the discussion (Stewart et al., 2007). Next, the transcript was segmented through coding,

allowing for the development of categories. After developing codes and categories, I reexamined the data in an effort to identify themes that offer insight into participants' commitment to realizing the strategic plans (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In summary, I chronicled the emergence of the strategic plans through describing the results of the participants' activities in each of the four phases of AI.

In an effort to explicitly answer research question two, examining participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning for the future of special education in a public school, I collected additional information through a survey combined with a focus group. Maxwell (2013) underscored that mixed methods allowed me to triangulate findings by employing "different methods to check on one another" (p. 102). Maxwell also expounded that mixed methods permitted me to investigate various aspects of a phenomena through divergent methodologies. Moreover, Yin (2009) explicated "mixed methods research can permit investigators to address more complicated research questions and collect a richer and stronger array of evidence than can be accomplished by any single method alone" (p. 63). I employed a parallel mixed model consisting of closed ended questions posed in the survey in conjunction with open ended questions discussed in the focus group (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). There are numerous analytic techniques for analyzing surveys. In keeping with the descriptive case study design proposed for this study, I used descriptive methods to analyze the data. I calculated a measure of central tendency in the form of a mean for every survey question. As a result, the survey provided findings in the form of an average score for all participants for each survey question.

As discussed previously, open ended questions embedded in focus groups expanded on the closed ended questions found in the survey (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). I used qualitative data analysis to analyze a tape-recorded focus group discussion about participants' experiences and perceptions of AI in an effort to collect additional qualitative data not possible to collect through the survey. Following a similar analysis process for focus groups previously described, I first transcribed the focus group, creating a verbatim transcript of the focus group discussion (Stewart et al., 2007). Next, the transcript was segmented through coding, allowing for the development of categories. After developing codes and categories, I reexamined the data in an effort to identify themes that offer insight into participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). After developing key themes from the focus group, I combined the descriptive statistics from the survey with the qualitative themes to triangulate the findings about participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as a method for strategic planning.

Next, I explored the extent to which this case mirrored the philosophical principles of AI. To this end, Stake (1995) illuminated that "the search for meaning is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions" (p. 78). Theory plays a pivotal role in case study methodology, enabling me to make inferences about the individual case relative to its underlying theory (Yin, 2009). I employed pattern matching to compare this individual case's observable pattern with the philosophical principles of AI as described in chapter two. Yin (2009) explained that pattern matching is relevant to descriptive case study as long as the "predicted pattern of specific variables is defined prior to data collection" (p. 137). Trochim (1989) explicated

that "a theoretical pattern is a hypothesis about what is expected in the data. The observable pattern consists of the data which are used to examine the theoretical model" (p. 357). In this study, I used the findings from research questions one and two as evidence of the observable pattern for the purpose of comparison with the philosophical principles of AI. I developed a two-sided matrix with one side labeled philosophical principles of AI and the other labeled the observable pattern. Next, I listed the previously described principles of AI with their individual characteristics under the column labeled philosophical principles of AI. I then developed a second list of evidence derived from research questions one and two under the column labeled observable pattern. Finally, I compared and contrasted the information in the various rows of the matrix, looking for similarities and differences. In summary, I compared the observable pattern with the philosophical principles of AI in an effort to identify similarities and differences between the two patterns.

Finally, I examined the alignment between AI as a method for strategic planning and Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning as presented in chapter two. I employed pattern matching to compare the observable pattern with Bryson's predictions. The findings from questions one, two, and three formed the basis of the observable pattern. In an effort to compare the observable pattern with the theoretical pattern, I developed a matrix with one side labeled Bryson's predications and the other side labeled observable pattern. Next, I listed Bryson's individual predictions with additional description under the column labeled Bryson's predictions. Then, I developed a list of evidence from research questions one, two, and three under the column labeled observable pattern. Finally, I compared and contrasted the two columns,

looking for similarities and differences. The comparison between the observable pattern and Bryson's predictions allowed me to make some inferences about AI as a strategic planning method based on the descriptive case study's findings.

Criteria for Judging Research Design

Yin (2009) espoused four tests to judge case study research. It is important to explicitly discuss each of these four tests in an effort to ensure the quality of the research design. The four tests are: (a) construct validity, (b) internal validity, (c) external validity, and (d) reliability (Yin, 2009, p. 41). Additionally, Stringer (2007) expounded that checks for trustworthiness are important to ensure that the research does "not merely reflect the particular perspectives, biases, or worldview of the researcher and that [the research outcomes] are not based solely on superficial or simplistic analyses of the issues investigated" (p. 57). In the following sections, I will explore the four tests to judge case study research and trustworthiness.

Construct validity. Construct validity is often cited as one of the weaknesses of the case study method with critics claiming that researchers make subjective decisions about what data should be collected and analyzed (Yin, 2009). Although, construct validity is a concern for case studies, this case study examined AI, which is itself a research methodology with prescribed phases and activities that guide data collection and analysis (Reed, 2007). Chapter two presented the four phases of AI as well as the activities participants engage in during the discovery, dream, design, and destiny phases. Decisions about data collection was limited to the various activities embedded in the four phases of AI. For example, during the discovery phase, participants interviewed other participants and stakeholders, and then, reported their findings back to the entire group,

allowing other subcommittee members to identify important themes and ideas from the findings. The data collected during this phase consisted of subcommittee members' notes identifying information they found important while listening to other participants. The data collected following the strategic planning effort consisted of a survey and focus group. Additionally, the collection of multiple sources of evidence strengthened the study's validity (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2009). In summary, the construct validity of this study was enhanced since the focus of this study was another research methodology with defined phases and methods for data collection. The collection of multiple sources of evidence also added to the study's construct validity.

Internal validity. Internal validity may critically limit a researchers' ability to make inferences based on the data collected during a study (Creswell, 2009). This case study employed descriptive research, seeking to report how plans emerge and participants' experiences and perceptions rather than make generalizations to a larger population. The descriptive approach diminishes threats to internal validity in comparison with case studies grounded in inferential research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Also, Creswell (2009) provided a list of potential threats to internal validity that must be considered when conducting research. Creswell identified the following types of threats to internal validity: (a) history, (b) maturation, (c) regression, (d) selection, (e) mortality, (f) diffusion of treatment, (g) compensation/resentful demoralization, (h) compensatory rivalry, (i) testing, and (j) instrumentation (pp. 163-164). After examining the types of threats to internal validity, it is apparent that the selection of participants and instrumentation must be examined explicitly to ensure internal validity in this study. The selection of participants was discussed in greater detail in the participant section of this

chapter. In this study, the teacher participants were selected by the assistant superintendent from a volunteer pool. School administrator participants were not volunteers, but rather assigned by the assistant superintendent to serve as members of the subcommittee on special education. In the case of parent participants, district-employed participants nominated them to join the strategic planning effort. Additionally, the instrumentation was discussed in great detail in the data sources section of this chapter. Also, the limitation section of chapter one noted that it was impractical to field test all instruments, but all instruments were grounded in research and/or developed based on similar instruments currently in use in AI. All instruments were also examined by the dissertation chair.

External validity. Gerring (2007) illuminated that external validity tends to be a weakness for case study research due to the case study's small n size and its ability to represent a larger population. In an effort to resolve issues regarding external validity and generalizability, this study offered a comprehensive investigation of AI theory and methodology in addition to numerous studies examining AI in education in Chapter two. Research question three, examining participants' experiences relative to AI's philosophical principles also offered some ground upon which to discuss the findings from this single case study. Hence, the external validity of this single case was strengthened through its grounding in AI theory. While it was not the intention of this case study to be generalizable to some larger population, examining the experiences of the participants during AI versus AI's philosophical principles offers the potential to discern any similarities and/or differences (Trochim, 1989) as well as the opportunity for readers to draw their own individual inferences. Finally, descriptive case study faces a

diminished hurdle when discussing external validity, because it only seeks to describe this particular case rather than generalize findings to other contexts.

Reliability. The final criteria for judging case study research deals with later researchers' ability to replicate the study and arrive at the same findings (Stringer, 2007; Yin, 2009). Chapter three offers an explicit description of the procedures planned for this study, which will allow other researchers to repeat this study at some later time. Also, clear procedures will be fundamentally important in this study, since the study examined a methodology for strategic planning. Future readers may wish to operationalize the procedures set forth in this study as a method for strategic planning within their context. Additionally, reliability in this study was strengthened through the development of a case study database (Yin, 2009). The case study database in this study consisted of participants' notes, physical artifacts, tape-recorded focus groups, and survey results. In summary, a description of procedures and a case study database enhanced the overall reliability of this descriptive mixed methods case study by offering future researchers clear procedures for repeating the study and the opportunity to examine evidence leading to the study's findings.

Trustworthiness. Checks for trustworthiness are important to "establish the veracity, truthfulness, or validity of the information and analyses that have emerged from the research process" (Stringer, 2007). Grounded in the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Stringer explained that researchers must address (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and confirmability to establish trustworthiness (p. 57).

Credibility. I employed various techniques to establish credibility in this case study. First, I engaged all participants throughout the entire strategic planning process as

well as during a survey and focus group immediately following the process. This prolonged engagement allowed me the opportunity to observe the strategic planning process in its entirety and offered participants ample occasions to provide feedback about AI as a method for strategic planning (Stringer, 2007). I also collected multiple sources of data. The data sources section of chapter three outlined the numerous forms of data collected such as focus groups, physical artifacts, and a survey. Maxwell (2013) suggested that collecting multiple sources of evidence enhances credibility in comparison with collecting only one source evidence. Finally, when possible, the evidence for the findings in chapter four are presented through actual participants' findings and words. Using actual participants' findings and words assist readers in developing their own naturalistic generalizations rather than simply relying on my interpretation of events, which would limit the reader's ability to vicariously experience the event and make their own generalizations (Stake, 1995).

Transferability. Gering (2007) expounded that the ability to make generalizations to a larger population is a weakness of case study research mainly due to its small n size. This case study endeavored to describe the experiences and perceptions of a small group of participants using AI to complete strategic planning in a public school district. Thus, the n size of this case study is very small and limited to a single context. In an effort to establish the transferability of this study to other contexts, it is imperative that the reader have a "detailed description of the context(s), activities, and events that are reported as part of the outcomes of the study" (Stinger, 2007, p. 59). I have provided the reader with a description of the context in chapter one that provides both sufficient information for the reader while protects the identity of the organization and participants.

Chapters three and four offered the reader considerable information about the participants, data sources, data collection, events, and activities. This information should allow the reader to explore the study's findings and make discussions about whether there exists any transferability between this study and the reader.

Dependability and confirmability. Dependability and confirmability are discussed together since I employed similar techniques to deal with both concepts. First, I discussed all methodology in great detail in chapter three. This transparency allows the reader to make decisions about the research process employed in this study. Also, all data sources, instruments, and data collection techniques utilized throughout this study were either discussed in chapter three, presented in chapter four, or displayed for the reader in the appendix. The development of a case study database as described by Yin (2009) permits the reader to examine, if requested, all evidence collected during this study, which further enhances the confirmability of this case study.

Ethical Consideration and Researcher Perspective

After reviewing the methodology and procedures, it is important to discuss ethical considerations and my perspective. My role was that of an insider participant researcher. Insider researchers have many advantages such as prior knowledge of the organization and established relationships, but also require considerable disclosure of my assumptions and expectations for any studies completed within their organizations (Reed, 2007). I played a pivotal role in the school district's selection of AI as a process for strategic planning. As a district administrator, I was involved in discussions about strategic planning and recommended AI as a process for strategic planning to the superintendent and assistant superintendent. Additionally, once AI was selected as the process for

strategic planning, I was involved in the pre-planning for the district's strategic planning sessions. As part of pre-planning, I helped train the other subcommittee facilitators and provided technical support to the assistant superintendent as he outlined the various subcommittee activities. To this end, I advocated for AI and helped the assistant superintendent facilitate the district-wide strategic planning effort.

In addition to my recommendation and support for AI as a strategic planning process, I also served as the district facilitator for the subcommittee for special education. As an insider participant researcher, it is important to recognize my pre-existing relationships with participants and the organization. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) explained,

> The higher the status of the researcher, the more access she has or the more networks she can access, particularly downward through the hierarchy. Of course, being in a high hierarchical position may exclude access to many informal and grapevine networks (p. 123).

I was a district-level administrator who possessed the highest hierarchical position in the subcommittee for special education. While I attempted to neutralize any negative effects of my position through clearly articulating the research agenda, encouraging others to view me as a participant, and diligently respecting other perspectives (Stringer, 2007), it was impossible to truly know how other participants perceived me. Moreover, it is likely that participants may have refrained from completely sharing their perspectives and/or simply did not participate freely throughout the study.

In addition to my perspective, it is important to consider the steps taken by me "to ensure that participants come to no harm as a result of their participation in the research

project" (Stringer, 2007, p. 54). In this study, I solicited prior approval from the organization. The superintendent of schools granted me permission to study the subcommittee for special education as it engaged in strategic planning using AI. Additionally, I provided informed consent several times throughout the study. I contacted every member of the subcommittee for special education prior to the first session to provide informed consent. Next, I read the following statement at the beginning of the first strategic planning session:

> As a member of the subcommittee on special education, you will be participating in a doctorate study for the College of William and Mary. The study will gather information via audiotaping, participants' notes, pictures of group work, and a brief survey at the end of this experience. The information gathered will focus on your experiences and perceptions as a member of the subcommittee on special education. A second area of information is the group findings at each stage of strategic planning. Your responses will contribute vital information about participants' experiences and perceptions working in committees using Appreciative Inquiry for the purpose of strategic planning. This information will provide insight to school districts considering using Appreciative Inquiry for strategic planning. Please note, your responses and statements will be confidential and no responses will be personally attributed to an individual participant. I sincerely thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Finally, I provide informed consent one last time as part of the AI post survey. The post survey is provided in Appendix D. Hence, I provided informed consent three different times throughout this study.

While informed consent was provided three times throughout data collection and no participants were harmed during that phase of this study, I sought informed consent again in order to gain participants' permission to analyze the data collected during the strategic planning process. As part of the informed consent to seek participants' permission to analyze data collected during the strategic planning process, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their identities were kept confidential and no responses were attributed to any participants. I coded the data and used pseudonyms as necessary to protect the identities of participants. I also employed a pseudonym to protect the identity of the organization. Finally, the informed consent contained contact information for participants to make formal complaints, should they feel that they were harmed by me in anyway during this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

Herr and Anderson (2005) explained, "Action research is inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them" (p. 3). This case study like action research was deeply embedded into a public school district's strategic planning effort. I worked both as a participant and as a researcher with the subcommittee on special education as we developed strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school. Stringer (2007) also underscored, "Human inquiry, like any other human activity, is both complex and always incomplete" (p. 179).

The study examining AI as a method to develop strategic plans for special education in a public school was intended to describe the strategic planning effort including participants' experiences and perceptions in this particular case and is not intended to be generalizable to other strategic planning efforts. Readers may draw

inferences based on the descriptions and findings provided throughout this study, but the study itself is not intended for generalization. It is possible that strategic planning efforts using AI in divergent contexts may acquire vastly different results.

Another limitation of this study was the numerous constraints of completing research closely connected with a school district. In this case, the school district had an unwavering timeline for completing strategic planning. As a result, I had to develop the research methodology and instrumentation necessary for collecting data on a short timeline. Consequently, there was no opportunity to fully pilot instruments before employing them. Although I could not adequately field test the instruments employed in this study, I did ground instruments in extant research and similar examples when possible. My inability to adequately field test instruments considerably limits their validity and reliability. I also was constrained by the school district in regard to the number of participants and amount of time available to engage participants in the strategic planning sessions.

Many of the participants in the strategic planning effort were volunteers. By nature, volunteers who decided to participate in this strategic planning effort may have had assumptions of positive experiences. In turn, these assumptions have the potential to produce bias results. It is likely that the experiences and perceptions of volunteers may be different than the experiences and perceptions of involuntary participants. The potential divergent experiences and perceptions of voluntary and involuntary participants in addition to volunteers' assumptions about their participation may limit this study's generalizability.

The study was limited to the strategic planning process and not to the pre-planning or implementation of the plan. The scope of the study consisted solely of the activities and information provided directly within the special education subcommittee's strategic planning sessions as the members engaged in AI to develop plans for the future of special education in the public school district. Additionally, there was one final session immediately following the completion of the strategic planning process in order to collect information about participants' experiences and perceptions of AI.

Finally, since the study examined AI, which is a research methodology with embedded participant data collection and analysis, I had to trust participants to actively engage in data collection and analysis throughout the study. For example, I was not present when participants completed AI interviews with stakeholders. As a result, I had to trust each participant to interview additional stakeholders using the AI interview protocol. I was also not sure that all participants fully engaged in all group activities such as analyzing other participants' AI interview reports. While participant involvement as prescribed by AI theory and methodology may limit my ability to ensure that participants appropriately collected and analyzed data, participant involvement is paramount to AI, and consequently, was an important component of this study.

Summary

This study examined AI as an approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school and strives to offer readers a description of how strategic plans emerge from AI as well as participants' experiences and perceptions of AI. The study also compared this individual case with the philosophical principles for AI in an effort to deduct similarities and differences. Finally, this study explored AI's alignment with

Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning in order to explore AI as a method for strategic planning. The study endeavored to answer four research questions by collecting data from numerous sources including participants' notes, physical artifacts, focus groups, and surveys. Table 1 summarizes the research questions, data collection, and data analysis. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques to answer research questions examining AI as an approach to strategic planning in public schools.

Table 1

AI as an Approach to Strategic Planning Data Collection and Analysis Worksheet

Research question	Data collection	Data analysis
1. How do plans for special education emerge as participants engage in the four phases of appreciative inquiry during strategic planning for the future of special education in a public school district?	Participants' notes	Qualitative Analysis, description of themes from participants' notes
	Physical artifacts including word walls, provocative propositions, and action plans	Time-series Analysis, Chronologies – description of physical artifacts
	Focus group on simple commitment	Qualitative Analysis, description of themes from focus group
2. What were participants' experiences and perceptions of appreciative inquiry as a method to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school?	Survey	Quantitative Analysis, descriptive statistics
	Focus group on participants' experiences and perceptions of AI.	Qualitative Analysis, description of themes from focus group
		Parallel mixed model combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to present findings.
3. To what extent did participants' experiences using appreciative inquiry mirror the philosophical principles of appreciative inquiry?	Findings from research questions one and two.	Pattern matching to identify similarities and differences between the observed and theoretical patterns.
4. To what extent did using appreciative inquiry to develop strategic plans align with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning in the next decade?	Findings from research questions one, two and three.	Pattern matching to identify alignment between AI as a method for strategic planning and Bryson's predictions for the future of strategic planning.

Chapter 4: Results

Public schools utilize strategic planning as a method to create plans for the future with the goal of improving performance and solving formidable problems. The purpose of this study was to examine Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as an approach to developing strategic plans for special education in a public school district. The study employed a descriptive mixed method case study approach, which offered me the flexibility to describe the strategic planning process as well as investigate other research questions exploring participants' experiences and perceptions of AI and pondering AI's alignment with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning. Data were collected during the public school's actual strategic planning process and immediately following the last session of strategic planning. The information used to answer the four research questions was collected through a descriptive mixed method case study approach. In accordance with this approach, data were collected through focus groups, survey questions, and artifacts. The study employed qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the data. Additionally, the data were analyzed through chronologies when participants completed individual and/or collective analysis as an embedded phase in the strategic planning process using AI.

Research Questions

Research Question 1. How do plans for special education emerge as participants engage in the four phases of appreciative inquiry during strategic planning for the future of special education in a public school district?

The description of the strategic planning process using AI provides a description of events during each of the four phases. During the first phase called discovery, subcommittee members had the opportunity to interview each other as well as 35 additional stakeholders. These interviews allowed subcommittee members to collect data about special education in the Will's Mountain School District from 47 of the district's stakeholders. Therefore, subcommittee members served as co-investigators collecting data from stakeholders rather than interpreting data selected and presented by the school district. Additionally, subcommittee members completed their own individual analysis of the data. The discovery phase and its embedded AI interviews provided a vehicle to foster organizational learning and facilitated individual analysis leading to important findings upon which later parts of the strategic plan were developed.

The dream phase provided subcommittee members with an opportunity to collectively analyze the data and organize it in a meaningful manner. AI provided subcommittee members the space and time to discuss their individual findings and compare those findings with other members' findings. Additionally, subcommittee members developed provocative propositions about special education in the Will's Mountain School District. During the development of provocative propositions, subcommittee members synthesized their individual findings from the AI interviews and collective findings from the word walls to create statements about special education in the school district. During the dream phase subcommittee members developed and agreed upon provocative propositions, which serve as the vision and mission statements for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

The design phase offered subcommittee members the opportunity to think about which steps were necessary for realizing the provocative propositions. Subcommittee members looked to their individual and collective findings to identify existing action steps already valued by stakeholders as well as wishes revealed during the AI interviews, which have the possibility of improving special education in the school district. Subcommittee members worked collaboratively to form the list of action steps for each provocative proposition. During the design phase, subcommittee members thought strategically about and identified action steps for realizing the provocative propositions.

The destiny phase offered subcommittee members the opportunity to identify individual ways in which they can commit to realizing the strategic plan. Subcommittee members voluntarily made public commitments to taking action. Additionally, subcommittee members brainstormed ways in which they and school leaders could communicate the strategic plan to other stakeholders in the school district. The destiny phase with subcommittee members focusing on specific actions that they could take to realize the strategic plan began the transition between the development of the strategic plan and its implementation.

Description of the strategic planning process using AI. The first session of strategic planning occurred on March 14, 2012 at the career and technology center. The special education subcommittee was one of five subcommittees using AI to develop strategic plans for the Will's Mountain School District. Within the special education subcommittee, there were 12 participants. There were three special education teachers, one each from the elementary, middle, and high school buildings. There were three regular education teachers, one from each of the district's three buildings. There were

two parents, one who had a child with a disability in the elementary school and another with a child with a disability in the high school. A parent of a student with a disability from the middle school was invited, accepted the invitation, but never attended strategic planning. There were three members of the district's administrative bargaining unit referred to as the Act 93 group. The members of the Act 93 group were an assistant elementary school principal, a dean of students from the middle school, and the school district's psychologist representing the high school. The last participant held multiple roles. I was director of special education for the Will's Mountain School District, a researcher for this study, and the group facilitator for the special education subcommittee as well as a parent of a child with a disability who was a student in the district.

During the opening ceremony at the first night of strategic planning, the participants from all five subcommittees gathered for dinner and to hear opening remarks from the superintendent of schools. Following his remarks, the assistant superintendent provided a brief description of the strategic planning process and then assigned the five subcommittees to individual rooms to begin the first session of strategic planning.

Discovery. The members of the subcommittee on special education gathered in the assigned room and introduced themselves to the rest of the group. After introductions, the subcommittee members paired in groups of two and completed AI interviews with their partners. After an hour, subcommittee members presented their findings from the AI interviews. While subcommittee members listened to other members describe their interviews, they made notes about important ideas and themes. At the close of the first session, I asked subcommittee members to interview three additional stakeholders, defining a stakeholder as anyone who lives in the Will's

Mountain School District and currently has or has had contact with special education services provided by the school district. As subcommittee members packed up to go home, they reflected on the first session. The elementary assistant principal stated, "I actually got excited during the discussion." The school psychologist asserted that, "I wished we could capture the energy in this group and take it out into the buildings."

The second session of strategic planning was on March 28, 2012 at the local career and technology center. All subcommittee members from the various committees gathered in the same room for brief opening remarks from the assistant superintendent. Next, the committees were released to their individual rooms. All subcommittee members were in attendance. I led a group discussion about subcommittee members' AI interviews with stakeholders and asked them to make notes about important themes and ideas. A parent of a high school student with a disability reported to me at the beginning of the second session, "You know, I interviewed different people. I really went out and tried to interview different people, but I kept finding the same sort of things popping up." The following are the major themes that emerged from my qualitative analysis of the AI interviews and subcommittee members' notes.

Experiences: Special education in the Will's Mountain School District provides academic and emotional support to students with disabilities. While discussing their interview findings, subcommittee members told stories of how special education offered students with disabilities assistance with their academic work as well as helped students build confidence. During the first session, the school psychologist retold a story that he heard during an AI interview with a parent of a high school student with a disability. He revealed that the parent told him,

> Her son always felt separated, not really connected to his peers and that a ninth grade learning support teacher really connected with her son and made him feel [like] he was somebody, like he was special and really brought out the best in him. As a result, she [the parent] saw a real increase in his confidence and found that he was making friends more easily and fit in much better.

Also during the first session, the elementary assistant principal told a story about his interview with an elementary regular education teacher. The regular education teacher talked about a relationship she witnessed between a learning support teacher and a student with a disability. The elementary assistant principal stated, "The student was calm and the learning support teacher made him feel comfortable. The learning support teacher made him, the student, feel good about school in comparison to other teachers who made the student feel like a hassle." During the second session, the parent of an elementary student with a disability reported that she had interviewed a parent of a student with a disability. The parent reported,

> As soon as her child was finally placed in special education, the child felt more confident and moved forward, so well that she advanced in math and got out of math [supported by special education] quickly. She's still in reading [with special education support], but got out of math quickly.

While listening to stories like these, all of the subcommittee members listed notes identifying academic and emotional support. For example, during session one, an elementary special education teacher recorded in her notes, "daughter-teacher put forth effort, she had a good experience." During session two, a middle school regular education

teacher noted, "getting help to stay on track and keep grades up; especially when they fall behind."

Value of special education: The value of special education in the Will's Mountain School District is its capacity to foster a positive learning experience for students with disabilities. Subcommittee members' stories from the interviews revealed the value of special education in the school district. During the first session, the director of special education reported on his interview with the middle school dean of students. The director of special education stated that the dean of students told him,

> He values the inclusiveness of special education students. The walls are coming down. He loves to see the kids [students with disabilities] excelling. The kids [students with disabilities] are more comfortable, they have better experiences, there is more confidence and the students are willing to take chances.

During the second session, the school psychologist described his interview with a student with a disability. He stated,

> My student said, that she values being able to receive the help whenever she needs it, having the extra person there when she's stressed out about something. When she's feeling overwhelmed, her [special education] teacher comes in with a really good attitude and helps her get less stressed.

An elementary regular education teacher, during the second session, retold her interview with a parent of a student with a disability. The elementary regular education teacher said that the parent stated, "My daughter has developed a good relationship with each of her learning support teachers." While listening to stories like these, all of the subcommittee members made notes about the value of special education to foster positive

experiences for students with disabilities. For example, during session one, a parent of an elementary student with a disability made a note stating, "accommodate to build confidence." During session two, the assistant elementary principal noted, "students [with disabilities] handling regular education materials with supports in place."

Function of special education: The function of special education in the Will's Mountain School District is to provide support by meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities. Subcommittee members' stories from their interviews underscored the function of special education in the school district. During session one, a high school special education teacher told a story about his interview with a high school regular education teacher. He explained that the regular education teacher stated,

> The function of special education is to enhance a student's ability to succeed. She [the teacher] needs glasses and that [another] person may need something read to them. What is the difference? They are both an accommodation that allows both to achieve at the maximum level.

During session two, the elementary assistant principal retold a story from his interview with a primary teacher. He reported that, "the primary teacher identified individualized attention that each student receives as the most important function." Similarly, a middle school special education teacher explained that a middle school life skills teacher said, "the most important function of special education is to evaluate students to determine function [ability to function in the regular education classroom] and needs and then teach [to] those needs through differentiated instruction in a pleasant, enjoyable learning environment." While listening to stories like these, all of the subcommittee members noted support through meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities as the

function of special education. For example, during session one, an elementary regular education teacher made a note stating, "support they [students with disabilities] get to function in regular education with modification; accommodation [for] the struggling learner." In session two, a middle school regular education teacher noted, "individualized attention and support."

Without special education: Students with disabilities in the Will's Mountain School District would not be successful in school, which in turn would result in numerous negative outcomes while in school and after schooling. Subcommittee members' stories from the interviews predicted several outcomes for students with disabilities if they would not have special education available to them. During session one, the director of special education described his interview with the middle school dean of students. The director summarized the dean's answer,

> It would be different if special education didn't exist, everyone would receive the same thing. He [the dean of students] thought that students will have higher frustration, that there will be more students [with disabilities] dropping out, that there would be more discipline, and that the students would not be excelling at the level they are.

Also during session one, a high school regular education teacher retold her interview with a high school special education teacher. The high school special education teacher stated, "it would be different because we would have a distinct line between the haves and the have not's, and there would be a big gap and then kids [students with disabilities] would quit, because they would be too frustrated." During session two, a parent of a high school student with a disability reported on her interview with a community member who

tutors students. The community member explained that, "if there wasn't special education, the institutions would be filled. Well, we don't have institutions like we used to. So, they'd probably be medicated and on the streets for lack of help." While listening to answers like these, all of the subcommittee members made notes about the severe consequences students with disabilities would face if special education did not exist. For example, during session one, a high school regular education teacher recorded in her notes, "increase in frustration, increase in discipline, increase in dropouts, increase in failure." During session two, a high school special education teacher noted, "institutions would be filled or medicated and on the streets." During the same session, a middle school regular education teacher noted, "students [with disabilities] would not be prepared for life without it [special education]."

Wishes: Subcommittee members identified the need for additional financial, human, and programmatic resources. Subcommittee members listened to other members' stories from the AI interviews and identified the need for additional resources. During session one, a middle school regular education teacher described how a middle school special education teacher answered the questions about wishes for special education. She stated, "she would like to see more emotional support services all around. Also, [she wished for] another option between life skills and learning support, particularly at the middle school." Also during session one, a parent of an elementary student with a disability interviewed an elementary special education teacher who wished for, "more time to spend with students in either small groups or individual. To have the resources to get the small group atmosphere." During session two, the school

psychologist described his interview with a high school student with a disability. The school psychologist explained,

> My student could only think of two wishes because she thinks things are going pretty well with her program. But she did say that she'd like for there to be another couple of special education teachers at the high school. She feels, especially last year, she would go to get help, and there would be so many kids in there [resource room] getting help that she really couldn't get the attention that she needed.

A high school regular education teacher interviewed the district's transition coordinator who wished for, "less paperwork, more individual time with students, and more transition help in the district as far as paid positions within the district, because those have been cut back, so she can't place as many students as she needs." While listening to stories like these, all of the subcommittee members noted the need for additional resources. For example, during session one, an elementary special education teacher made a note stating, "more options in between learning support and life skills." A high school special education teacher noted, "best equipment and technology and access to best resources." During session two, the school psychologist noted, "more money for programs including transition." During the same session, a middle school special education teacher noted, "more pay for special education teachers."

Wishes: Participants identified the need for greater commitment to special education from regular education teachers. Subcommittee members listened to stories collected during the AI interviews and identified a need for greater commitment from regular education teachers. During session one, the director of special education

interviewed the middle school dean of students who stated, "a lot of regular education teachers are doing a lot of good things, but he [middle school dean of students] would like to see a higher percentage of them taking on the responsibility of communicating with parents of special education students." During session two, the elementary assistant principal interviewed a learning support teacher who told him, "greater understanding, more willingness to provide accommodations by teachers in regular education." The school psychologist interviewed a parent of a student with a disability who stated, "wish number one was for regular education teachers to be more aware and understanding of students with disabilities, including ADHD and giftedness. She'd like for them to drop misconceptions and develop more current understandings of disabilities." While listening to stories like these, 11 out 12 or 92% of the subcommittee members noted greater commitment to special education from regular education teachers as a wish. For example, during session one, a high school special education teacher noted, "higher percentage of regular education teachers participating in special education." Also during session one, an elementary regular education teacher noted, "more [of the] village not just special education teachers." During session two, an elementary assistant principal noted, "open minded regular education teachers." During the same session, a parent of a high school student with a disability noted, "regular education-drop misconceptions."

Dream. After subcommittee members finished sharing the stories collected during the AI interviews, I explained to the subcommittee members that the discovery phase had ended and we were now beginning the dream phase. I explained that we were going to use our notes to create either word walls or pictures representing the important themes identified during the discovery phase. All subcommittee members joined in this

activity. After a half an hour of collectively analyzing their individual notes and developing word walls, the subcommittee members agreed upon four groups of word walls (see Table 2). Table 2 shows the theme for each of the four word walls and examples of subcommittee members' collective findings used to identify the major themes.

Table 2

Themes and Word Walls Generated During the Dream Phase

Major themes as generated by the subcommittee members	Examples from the subcommittee's word walls
Communication	▪ Communication from learning support and regular education teachers ▪ Communication between levels ▪ Explaining disability to student, parent, etc. ▪ Positive feedback or just feedback ▪ Collaboration between parents and teachers
Individual needs	▪ Modifications ▪ Progress monitoring ▪ Faster testing/identification ▪ Specially designed instruction ▪ Differentiated instruction
Positive experiences	▪ Build confidence and self esteem ▪ Unconditional positive regards ▪ Social interactions and peer relations ▪ Advocate for students ▪ Empathy not sympathy
Resources	▪ Money ▪ More staffing ▪ Work experience opportunities ▪ Adapted physical education and music ▪ Spot between learning support and life skills ▪ More inclusion at the elementary school

After developing four groups of word walls, I explained to subcommittee members that we were going to develop some provocative propositions about special education in the Will's Mountain School District. I divided the subcommittee into four groups. Each group of three subcommittee members was asked to go to one of the word walls. The four groups reviewed their selected word wall and wrote a rough draft of a provocative proposition. After ten minutes, the groups rotated to their right and edited another group's work. When the groups arrived back to their original location, they read the provocative proposition and quickly agreed upon the wording of three out of the four provocative propositions. One provocative proposition took three edits and approximately 20 minutes of discussion before the subcommittee agreed on the provocative proposition (see Figure 3). Figure 3 shows the four provocative propositions developed by the subcommittee on special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

Figure 3

Provocative Propositions Developed by the Subcommittee on Special Education

- The Will's Mountain School District will take a collaborative approach to meet students' needs. We will consistently communicate through a multitude of methods with students, parents, staff, and community.

- The Will's Mountain School District will meet the individual needs of our special education students by developing Individualized Education Plans grounded in research-based strategies and guided by continuous progress monitoring. We believe that customized instructional practices will enable students to achieve their goals.

- In the Will's Mountain School District, we foster the overall well-being of all students by instilling confidence through academic success and positive social interaction in a compassionate and patient environment. We will advocate for students to meet their full potential academically, socially, and emotionally, to ensure readiness for the future.

- Within the Will's Mountain School District, educators will use resources to their maximum potential to provide highly qualified staff with innovative and diverse programs to meet students' needs. Continuous professional development will ensure that staff members possess the knowledge and skills to provide the most effective instruction. Students will achieve academic success through early intervention, inclusion, co-teaching, mentoring programs, differentiated instruction, vocational experiences, and transition opportunities.

After completing the provocative propositions, I reminded subcommittee members of the next session and dismissed them for the evening. Two subcommittee members stayed after the session to help reorganize the room. During the clean-up, the middle school dean of students stated, "this was a great process and it was so easy. I could not imagine doing it another way."

Design. The final day of strategic planning in the Will's Mountain School District occurred on April 18, 2012. The day was divided into two sessions. The first session began at 8:00 am at the career and technology center. After receiving brief directions from the assistant superintendent, the subcommittees went to their assigned rooms. Two subcommittee members could not attend this session. One member was ill and another member planned to attend later in the day after completing another duty for the school district. There were ten subcommittee members in attendance. I explained to the subcommittee that this was the design phase of AI, and that we would identify steps to help realize the provocative propositions. I then asked the subcommittee members to divide into groups and stand beside one of the provocative propositions. Each group brainstormed the important steps to realize a provocative proposition and listed them. The group then rotated to their right, read another group'(s) work, and added their ideas. When the groups returned to their original provocative proposition, the subcommittee read each list connected to a provocative proposition and made only a few edits to remove repetitive action steps (see Table 3). Table 3 shows the action steps and respective provocative propositions, which represent the strategic plan for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

Table 3

Will's Mountain School District's Strategic Plan for Special Education

Provocative proposition	Action steps
The Will's Mountain School District will take a collaborative approach to meet students' needs. We will consistently communicate through a multitude of methods with students, parents, staff, and community.	▪ More effective communication between regular education teachers, special education teachers and parents is imperative (emails and phone calls). ▪ More communication between buildings and grade-levels (end of year 5-6th meeting and 8-9th meeting during in-service in March). ▪ Common planning time for teachers. ▪ More scheduled parent-teacher conferences. ▪ District-wide lesson plans on website. ▪ Keep MMS updated. ▪ Weekly student progress to both student and parent. ▪ In-service day for cross building team/planning meetings. (Similar to this process) ▪ More detailed IEP progress reports ▪ What skills were worked on. ▪ Graphs are not enough. ▪ Parent trainings ▪ Timely communication of everything, discipline, and grades. ▪ Inter-agency communication. ▪ Parent concerns on IEP should have a survey/checklist to get enough details. ▪ Administration communicates urgency of communication. ▪ Updated web pages.
The Will's Mountain School District will meet the individual needs of our special education students by developing Individualized Education Plans grounded in research-based strategies and guided by continuous progress monitoring. We believe that customized instructional practices will enable students to achieve their goals.	▪ District-wide detailed progress monitoring. ▪ District-wide in-service to train all staff on research based strategies. ▪ Consistent development of IEPs and GIEPs through grade level. (District wide terminology for IEPs and GIEPs). Connect goals to evaluations, progress monitoring and present levels. ▪ At initial evaluation meetings, parents receive a comprehensive overview of the districts K-12 programs and services dealing with child's disability and ability. ▪ Plain English explanation of evaluations, IEPs, progress monitoring and instructional methods.

Provocative proposition	Action steps
	▪ Wording of goals connected to state standards. ▪ Ensuring data is available to all. ▪ Focus on data through transition years (5-6th) and (8-9th). ▪ Provide a variety of high quality research-based materials. ▪ Progress monitoring data is kept and passed along with the student. (Portfolio K-12 including data, work samples relative to the student's disability). ▪ Clear gifted program stat is consistent K-12 with staffing. ▪ Better progress monitoring training for regular education teachers when inclusion is involved. ▪ Assisted tech devices (iPads, reading pens). ▪ Focus on collaborative effort for IEP/GIEP input (not full responsibility for special education teacher). ▪ Explore District-wide progress monitoring that grows with students' needs. (Technology).
In the Will's Mountain School District, we foster the overall well-being of all students by instilling confidence through academic success and positive social interaction in a compassionate and patient environment. We will advocate for students to meet their full potential academically, socially, and emotionally, to ensure readiness for the future.	▪ Provide opportunity for more collaboration to promote advocacy for our students. ▪ Provide programs that promote success. ▪ Acknowledge student success in all areas not just academics (Antelope Awards, Will's Mountain Elementary Awards). ▪ More transition funding to prepare students for the future. ▪ Funding for technology. ▪ Tutoring programs (peer and voluntary) ▪ Character education program including focus on anti-bullying. ▪ More opportunity for emotional support (class, peer discussion groups, and programs). ▪ Handling discipline consistently (teachers and administrators). ▪ Character development for staff. ▪ Advisory program to meet with student (review grades and assignments, teach study skills and organization). ▪ Every student connects with at least one adult in the building. ▪ Mentoring program student-to-student. ▪ District-wide SAP and provide training for everyone. ▪ Professional development for dealing with students with social and emotional problems.
Within the Will's Mountain School District, educators will	▪ Co-teaching at all levels ▪ Professional development

Provocative proposition	Action steps
use resources to their maximum potential to provide highly qualified staff with innovative and diverse programs to meet students' needs. Continuous professional development will ensure that staff members possess the knowledge and skills to provide the most effective instruction. Students will achieve academic success through early intervention, inclusion, co-teaching, mentoring programs, differentiated instruction, vocational experiences, and transition opportunities.	▪ Combined with best instructional strategies ▪ Pull out at every level. ▪ Explore training and benefits of mentor programs. ▪ Find more transition opportunities. ▪ Professional development in reading and math across curriculum. ▪ Attend professional conferences. ▪ Committees focusing on innovative and diverse programs. ▪ Schedule staff to maximize potential. ▪ Better staff mentoring program for new teachers. ▪ Collaboration between local business and school. ▪ Strengthened Early Intervention/ RtII program K-5. ▪ Training on co-teaching, differentiated instruction. ▪ Liaison between District and community to provide transition opportunities. ▪ More vocational opportunities for students who are younger than the eligible grades for Career Center. ▪ Provide effective educational experiences for Life Skill Students in an inclusive setting.

Destiny. After the subcommittee completed the action steps, I gave them a ten minute break. Upon returning, I explained to the subcommittee members that we were now in the destiny phase and that we were going to discuss actions that subcommittee members could take to realize the provocative propositions over the upcoming years. There were ten subcommittee members present for this focus group. My qualitative analysis of the focus group revealed three themes.

Nine out of ten or 90% of the subcommittee members present during the focus group identified action(s) that they could take to realize the provocative propositions and action plans. During the focus group, subcommittee members talked about individual actions that they could take to realize the provocative propositions. A middle school special education teacher stated, "I would like to look at progress monitoring (...) try to find something that is consistent especially with the reading and even the math assessment tools." The middle school dean of students explained, "I would like to look for those times where we can meet building to building (...) so I would like to sit down and look at the calendar and find when that is available." The school psychologist pledged to strike a balance when writing evaluation reports. He explained,

> I will strike a balance when I am writing a report because you have to communicate to other professionals also who might read it but also to parents. [I will] put it into a language that parents can really get something out of not just jargon or psycho babble that is something I can commit to.

A middle school regular education teacher committed to, "I want to tell regular education teachers, we need to get on this and help them [special education teachers] out because it's not just their job. These are our kids in our district. We all need to do it."

Five out of ten or 50% of the subcommittee members identified the importance of leadership in communicating the provocative propositions and action plans to stakeholders who did not participate in strategic planning. During the focus groups, subcommittee members identified not only tasks for current districts leaders, but also identified ways in which subcommittee members could take a leadership role in communicating the strategic plan. A middle school special education teacher explained that the director of special education could set up a staff meeting to talk about progress monitoring. She stated,

> I think one way [to communicate the plan] is actually for you [the director of special education] to set up a special education staff meeting (...) we could talk K-12 as special education teachers, how we're going to do it, even writing goals, the portfolios, all of those things, we could sit and talk about it together.

An elementary regular education teacher called for an in-service day to communicate the strategic plan. In conjunction with the in-service day, the elementary regular education teacher suggested, "putting several of us [subcommittee members] with a group that can facilitate it, might be more than just going out and trying to advocate within our buildings." A high school special education teacher made the case for subcommittee members to serve as leaders. He elucidated,

> I think what holds back almost any educational institution is the unwillingness to change. They're just doing the same, that's a pitfall for everyone (...) so we could all become leaders and advocates for change. We've got to get better; we've got to try new things.

Six out of ten or 60% of the subcommittee members revealed that the AI process increased their level of commitment while three out of ten or 30% of the subcommittee members stated that the AI process reaffirmed their commitment to special education in the Will's Mountain School District. During the focus group, subcommittee members talked about their individual levels of commitment. While no one believed the process had a negative effect on commitment, subcommittee members discussed how the AI process either strengthened their commitment or reaffirmed their existing commitment to special education. A middle school regular education teacher expressed her increase in commitment in the following statement, "I think from a regular education teacher's standpoint, we need to do more, period. We need to help you guys out more, we need to do what we can to help you out more; we need to do more." The school psychologist explained,

> It [AI process] reaffirmed for me, also. I leave this process kind of feeling excited. To sit down with a diverse group like this and to hear so much commitment from not only special education folks, who I talk to all the time, but also regular [education teachers] and administration. It's just really been great. I'm really looking forward to where we go from here.

The elementary assistant principal explained why his commitment was strong. He stated, "The commitment is strong because we have, I mean because I had such an ability to provide input into the plan and the process and so on and the positive approach that was taken to this."

Research Question 2. What were participants' experiences and perceptions of appreciative inquiry as a method to develop strategic plans for the future of special education in a public school district?

Following the last session of strategic planning, 11 subcommittee members completed a survey consisting of 11 questions divided into five sections. In general, the survey (see Appendix D) explored subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions of using AI for strategic planning. Specifically, the survey examined participants' experiences and perceptions in the areas of collaboration/participation, identifying life-giving forces, imagining a positive future/positive change, positivity, and overall experiences and perceptions. Subcommittee members answered the survey questions by selecting either strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. Points were assigned to each possible answer as follows: (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) neutral, (2) disagree, and (1) strongly disagree. The mean for each question from all subcommittee members' answers was calculated in order to present the findings for each question (see Table 4). Table 4 shows the mean for each survey questions exploring subcommittee members' experiences and perception of AI.

Table 4

Survey Results: Subcommittee Members Experiences and Perceptions of AI

	Survey questions	*M*
1.	During this process, I engaged in positive dialogue about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.73
2.	During this process, I listened to other participants' thoughts about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.91
3.	During this process, I focused on the strengths rather than weaknesses of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.64
4.	During this process, I identified the value of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.82
5.	During this process, I imagined a positive future for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.82
6.	This process inspired me to think about greater possibilities for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.91
7.	This process generated positive feelings about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.64
8.	During this process, I experienced optimism for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.73
9.	My participation in this process increased my commitment to the success of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.	4.73
10.	I believe that committee work using this process will generally produce positive outcomes.	4.55
11.	I am more likely to volunteer to work in committees using this process.	4.36

In addition to the survey, I collected qualitative data through a focus group exploring subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions of AI. The interview guide for the post appreciative inquiry focus group (see Appendix E) was aligned with the closed-ended survey questions in an effort to allow participants to speak openly about their experiences and perceptions. I employed qualitative analysis to code and categorize the data gathered through the focus group. Next, I compared the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses and used evidence from both in order to develop the following major themes.

Subcommittee members experienced collaboration through positive dialogue and the opportunity to listen to other subcommittee members' ideas and thoughts about special education in the Will's Mountain School District. There were two survey questions examining subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions relative to collaboration during strategic planning using AI. The first question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "during this process, I engaged in positive dialogue about special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.73 on a five point scale for agreement with five indicating strong agreement and four indicating agreement. Subcommittee members' responses to this question indicated that they engaged in positive dialogue about special education during strategic planning using AI. During the focus group, an elementary regular education teacher explained, "we all came here expecting, oh, we're going to be talking about the negative things and it didn't go that route." She indicated that the questions surprised people and solicited a positive response. The elementary regular education teacher revealed, "It was a different type of question, and so therefore, they gave a different type of answer." A high school

special education teacher conducted his own experiment during the AI interviews. He explained, "I interviewed a teacher that does her fair share of complaining because I just wanted to see how this would work out, and it was funny; she was positive for 20 minutes."

The second survey question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "during this process, I listened to other participant's thoughts about special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.91 on a five point scale for agreement. Subcommittee members' responses to this question indicated that they listened to other participants' thought about special education during strategic planning using AI. During the focus group, a high school regular education teacher explicated,

> It's much easier to buy into something when you feel like you actually have something in it, and somebody actually listened to it. It's not the typical structure where somebody tweaked it and they just wanted you to rubberstamp it. It gave you a chance to see, like get what everybody else was thinking (...), while you're standing there waiting to write on the poster, it was exchanging ideas.

Similarly, the middle school dean of students underscored, "I think it was easier to come up with ideas because you could listen to someone and add to it or change it a little bit, so I think it was enhanced, we were able to come up with better ideas that way." A high school special education teacher remarked, "You hear the same thing ten times, it must be right. It must be true. That must be a strength. You might've thought that on your own, but it just reinforces the fact if ten people said this in a row." An assistant elementary

principal summarized the collaboration, "The whole thing was a collaborative effort. Collaboration was just an integral part of the whole thing."

Subcommittee members revealed that the AI interview's unique focus helped them to identify the positive aspects of special education in the Will's Mountain School District. There were two survey questions examining subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions relative to identifying life giving forces such as value, strengths, positive organizational attributes, and organizational excellence in special education in the Will's Mountain School District. The first question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "during this process, I focused on the strengths rather than weaknesses of special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.64 on a five scale for agreement. Subcommittee members' responses indicated that they focused on the strengths of special education in the school district during strategic planning rather than the weaknesses. During the focus group, subcommittee members revealed that they did not focus on the negative. An elementary regular education teacher elucidated, "I think everybody is used to hearing negatives and hear what we have to do, but it [AI] was the opposite." A middle school regular education teacher explained AI's distinct focus,

> You don't focus on, this is where we're really terrible. We need to fix this and this. It [AI] was more of, this is where we want to be. We're not there yet (...) So you're fixing the problems, but you're not dwelling on them.

The second survey question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "during this process, I identified the value of special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.82 on a five point scale for

agreement. Subcommittee members' responses indicated that they identified that value of special education in the school district during strategic planning using AI. During the focus group, subcommittee members struggled to describe how AI helped them to identify the value of special education. Three subcommittee members revealed that the themes discovered during the interviews allowed them to identify the value of special education in the school district. A middle school regular education teacher stated, "During the interviews, it [AI] allows you to pick out what not only you value but what other people value." A high school special education teacher responded to my question asking how AI helped you to identify the value of special education, "isn't that identifying the common themes?" The high school special education teacher continued to explain, "I mean that it is how it [AI] helped us figure out what was important in looking at those common themes."

AI's focus on the positive allowed subcommittee members to imagine a positive future for special education in the Will's Mountain School District. There were two survey questions examining subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions relative to imagining a positive future. The first question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "during this process, I imagined a positive future for special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.82 on a five point scale for agreement. Subcommittee members' survey responses indicated that they imagined a positive future for special education in the school district during strategic planning. The second survey question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "this process inspired me to think of greater possibilities for special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.91 on a five point

scale for agreement. Subcommittee members' responses indicated that strategic planning using AI inspired them to think of greater possibilities for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District. During the focus group, subcommittee members revealed that AI's focus on the positive rather than the negative allowed them to imagine a positive future. The middle school dean of students explained,

> I believe it was called the dream phase or whatever, instead of looking at it from a deficit side, we don't have this, we don't have this, we look at, this is what we want to be. So I think that forced you to imagine it in a positive way.

A middle school regular education teacher initially questioned how AI would offer subcommittee members an opportunity to address issues while planning for the future. The middle school teacher stated,

> How can we ever grow if you don't admit there's mistakes or flaws to begin with? And then we started diving into it [AI], and I'm like, well they [mistakes or flaws] come up. But it's not so much your mistakes. We just need to improve this or this needs developed or this needs to change. So it is not necessarily focusing on the negative, but the things that you need to improve upon still come up.

Subcommittee members' conversations during AI fostered positive feelings amongst participants during strategic planning for special education in the Will's Mountain School District. There were two survey questions examining subcommittee members' feelings during strategic planning using AI. The first question asked participants if they agreed with the statement, "this process generated positive feelings about special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.64 on a five point scale for agreement. Subcommittee members'

responses indicated that strategic planning using AI generated positive feelings about special education in the school district. The second survey question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "during this process, I experienced optimism for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.73 on a five point scale for agreement. Subcommittee members' responses indicated that during strategic planning using AI, they experienced optimism for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District. During the focus group, subcommittee members revealed that conversations during AI led to positive feelings. When I asked the questions did you experience positive feelings and emotions during strategic planning? If so, can you describe how the AI process developed positive feelings and emotions in you? An elementary special education teacher answered, "I would say yes. And how it did it was if someone brought up a positive thing and you were the one that was doing that, that kind of made you feel good, yeah, I am doing this, right." Similarly, a middle school special education teacher answered,

> I would say yes too. I think as a middle school staff, we think, is anybody else thinking the exact same thing we are and [then] we heard it from the elementary, from the high school. Yeah. Everybody is thinking the same thing, and it's nice to hear that we either need to do this through the action statements or it should be of the most importance in special education.

A parent of an elementary student with a disability stated, "I don't usually like to speak out, but when I did you guys listened, and it made me feel proud of myself for actually speaking up and saying something." An assistant elementary principal summarized the power of conversation,

> The relationships we built too, I think it was pretty neat to do the interview one-on-one with somebody else, to get the chance to chit chat back and forth and then work in the groups and going around to each station and laughing and having a good time.

Subcommittee members found that AI offered an inclusive and logical process for committee work and developing plans for special education in the Will's Mountain School District. There were three survey questions examining subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions of AI. The first survey question asked participants if they agreed with the statement, "my participation in this process increased my commitment to the success of special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.73 on a five point scale for agreement. Subcommittee members' responses indicated that their participation increased their commitment to the success of special education in the school district. The second survey question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "I believe committee work using this process will generally produce positive outcomes." The mean for this question was 4.55 on a five point scale for agreement. Subcommittee members' responses indicated that they believe that committee work using AI would generally produce positive outcomes. The third survey question asked participants if they agreed with the statement, "I am more likely to volunteer to work on committees using this process." The mean for this question was 4.36 on a five point scale for agreement. Although the mean for this question was above four indicating that as a group they agreed, it resulted in the lowest mean score for all questions. One subcommittee member did indicate neutral while the rest either strongly agreed or agreed. As a group, subcommittee members' responses indicated that they

would be more likely to work in committees using AI. During the focus group, I asked subcommittee members about their opinion of the AI process. Subcommittee members believed that AI offers a rational and inclusive approach to developing strategic plans. A middle school dean of students said, "I think it's [AI is] a productive, logical way of going about business. I like having that. I'm a math person, so I like having a step-by-step process." An elementary special education teacher explained,

> You created the opinion or created the statement, so it wasn't someone trying to force us to follow what they wanted. Where a lot of committees, it does feel like, this is what we want, now you figure out how we get there.

A school psychologist reported,

> You just feel like you're building something and that made it kind of exciting because there was a very logical process that you were following. At every step, you were building on what you've already done in such a logical way. It just really felt empowering and exciting to be doing it from that perspective. So yeah, I felt like I had a really positive experience with it.

Research Question 3. To what extent did participants' experiences using appreciative inquiry mirror the philosophical principles of appreciative inquiry?

Chapter two presented the five philosophical principles of AI. Those principles were: (a) the constructionist principle, (b) the principle of simultaneity, (c) the poetic principle, (d) the anticipatory principle, and (e) the positive principle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, pp. 45-53). In an effort to answer research question three, examining to what extent did participants' experiences mirror the philosophical principles of AI, I used

the data collected during the strategic planning process as well as the survey and focus group immediately following strategic planning.

The constructionist principle. The constructionist principle holds that human knowledge and the future of organizations are connected (Fitzgreald, Murrell & Newman, 2001). Additionally, the constructionist principle holds that humans make sense of their environment socially (Calabrese et al., 2007). Finegold, Holland and Lingham (2002) explained, "the locus of knowledge is in our relationships and we construct our reality through our conversations and social interactions" (p. 237). There is evidence that the subcommittee members' experiences mirrored the constructionist principle. The two survey questions asking about collaboration revealed that subcommittee members engaged in positive dialogue as well as listened to other participants' thoughts about special education in the school district. The first question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "during this process, I engaged in positive dialogue about special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.73 with eight subcommittee members strongly agreeing and three subcommittee members agreeing. The second survey question asked participants if they agreed with the statement, "during this process, I listened to other participants' thoughts about special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.91 with ten subcommittee members strongly agreeing and one subcommittee member agreeing. In addition to the survey questions, subcommittee members' quotes extended the evidence establishing a connection between subcommittee members' experiences and the constructionist principle. A middle school regular education teacher reflected on the process and how subcommittee members' notes

developed while listening to the stories from the AI interviews helped them make sense of special education in the school district. The middle school regular education teacher revealed,

> We took our notes [from the AI interviews], and we made the first original list, and from there, we made our provocative statements. And without those first original lists, we could've generated them, but would they have been as in-depth as they were had we not gotten the input from outsiders as well. So we were able to identify those – those common themes. And I think that drove the rest of what we did. The process drove the rest of what we did.

A middle school dean of students suggested conversations were important and helped subcommittee members develop better ideas for strategic planning,

> I think it was easier to come up with ideas because of that, because you could listen to someone and add to it or change it a little bit, so I think it enhanced. We were able to come up with better ideas that way.

In summary, subcommittee members' experiences mirrored the constructionist principle.

The simultaneity principle. The simultaneity principle holds that "inquiry and change are not separate, but are simultaneous. Inquiry is intervention." (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005, p. 50). Watkins et al. (2011) explained that the first questions are fateful and will direct the organization's energy, producing change. It is difficult to know how much change was produced by the AI interview questions during this strategic planning process. Subcommittee members did indicate that the AI interview questions were unexpected and different, resulting in different answers and positive direction of energy. An elementary regular education teacher elucidated,

> It wasn't the expectation of what they [other stakeholders] thought that you were going to ask them. It was a different type of question, and so therefore, they gave a different type of answer (...) they gave what they wanted changed in their wish, but it was in a positive way. It wasn't in a, well, this is bad, and this is what needs fixed.

In regards to change, several subcommittee members indicated that the experience produced change in them personally. A middle school regular education teacher revealed that after listening to the stories from the AI interviews, she wanted to advocate more for students with disabilities. She explained,

> For me, I want to tell other regular education teachers, we need to get on this and help them [special education teachers] out because it's not just their job (...) it needs to be a team collaborative effort. It just needs to be more. I wish I could go to your school [another member's school] and do that.

Finally, an elementary assistant principal reflected on the process alone with me after strategic planning ended. His thoughts captured AI's ability to produce change. He stated, "the process was great. I believe it actually produced personal growth in some of the participants, they seem different, more engaged, and more willing to speak up." In fact, during the focus group in the destiny phase, six out of ten or 60% of the subcommittee members did report an increase in commitment as a result of the AI process. Additionally, the survey question asking if participants agreed with the statement, "my participation in this process increased my commitment to the success of special education in the Will's Mountain School District" had a mean of 4.73 with eight subcommittee members strongly agreeing and three agreeing. While it is difficult to

gauge if AI caused change to happen at the same time inquiry was occurring, there is evidence that AI interview questions were fateful and directed the groups' energy by focusing on past and current examples of positive experiences and performances as well as wishes for the future of special education in the school district. Also, some subcommittee members did report personal change and/or an increase in commitment for special education as a result of their participation in AI.

The poetic principle. The poetic principle holds that topics are not dictated, but they are socially created (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The poetic principle also affords participants the power to choose their lens for looking at the organization (Finegold et al. 2002). Subcommittee members did not have the freedom to choose their topic of study or lens for viewing the organization. During strategic planning at the Will's Mountain School District, the school district leadership decided to employ AI as the methodology for strategic planning. Additionally, the school district leadership developed the interview guides for all subcommittees prior to the strategic planning event. The only subcommittee members involved in the development of the AI interview guides were group facilitators who were also members of the district's leadership team. The school district also assigned subcommittee members who volunteered to participate in strategic planning to one of five subcommittees without, in many cases, asking the participants' preferences. Many of the subcommittee members for special education received notice of their committee assignment when I solicited their initial consent to participant in strategic planning and this study. As a result, subcommittee members did not have any freedom to select the topic or an opportunity to provide input into the development of the AI interview questions. Subcommittee members also had little

freedom to select their lens for viewing the organization since the wording of AI interview questions are developed specifically to cast an affirmative lens. There were no survey questions exploring subcommittee members' involvement in selecting the topic, developing questions, or choosing a lens from which to study the topic. In summary, subcommittee members' experiences did not mirror the poetic principle due to the subcommittee members' lack of choice regarding the topic, questions, and lens.

The anticipatory principle. The anticipatory principle holds that people within organizations socially create organizations based on their collective imagination (Cooperrider et al., 1995). Watkins et al. (2011) suggested, "The Anticipatory Principle says that the most important resources we have for generating constructive organizational change or improvement are our collective imagination and our discourse about the future" (p. 73). There is evidence that subcommittee members' experiences mirrored the anticipatory principle. There are two survey questions related to this principle. The first question asked participants if they agreed with the statement, "during this process, I imagined a positive future for special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.82 with nine subcommittee members strongly agreeing and two agreeing. The second survey question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "this process inspired me to think about greater possibilities for special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.91 with ten subcommittee members strongly agreeing and one agreeing. The four provocative propositions and action steps are manifestations of collective imagining by subcommittee members. All subcommittee members participated in the development of the four provocative propositions, which captured the subcommittee's collective

imagination for special education in the school district. During the focus group, I asked, during strategic planning did you imagine a positive future for special education? A review of the audio revealed numerous subcommittee members instantly responding, "yes". When asked how AI helped you to imagine a positive future for special education, subcommittee members explained that AI's focus on the positive helped them imagine a positive future. In summary, there is evidence that subcommittee members' experiences mirrored the anticipatory principle.

The positive principle. Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) suggested that the positive principle holds, "momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding- hope, inspiration, and sheer joy in creating with one another" (p. 63). There is evidence that subcommittee members' experiences mirrored the positive principle. Two survey questions probed subcommittee members' feelings during AI. The first question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "this process generated positive feelings about special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.64 with seven subcommittee members strongly agreeing and four agreeing. The second survey question asked participants if they agreed with the statement, "during this process I experienced optimism for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.73 with eight subcommittee members strongly agreeing and three agreeing. Subcommittee members also expressed their positive feelings during the focus group and individual discussions. A school psychologist revealed,

> I leave this process kind of feeling excited. To sit down with a diverse group like this and to hear so much commitment from not only special education folks who I

> talk to all the time, but also regular [education teachers] and administration. It's just been really great. I'm looking forward to where we go from here.

After the first session, an elementary assistant principal stated, "I actually got excited during the discussion." After the second session, a high school special education teacher expressed his feelings about the strategic planning process. He wrote an email stating, "oddly enough, I am enjoying our discussions and I am getting excited about the future of our district." A middle school regular education teacher reflected on how positive feelings fostered during AI helped her to view her current actions from a new perspective instead of triggering negative feelings. She elucidated,

> But even things that I heard that I don't do, I'm like, oh well, that just makes more sense. So the whole environment makes you think of it more positively instead of being like, oh, they're just attacking me. They think I'm bad. I mean it [AI] just fosters positivity about it. And you're, oh, that's another way to see it, or I could do that in my room.

In summary, subcommittee members' experiences mirrored the positive principle.

Research Question 4. To what extent did using appreciative inquiry to develop strategic plans align with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning in the next decade?

Chapter two outlined Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning in the next decade (see Chapter two, p. 17). Question four explores the alignment between AI as applied in this study and Bryson's predictions for the future of strategic planning. The following sections offer a brief explanation of Bryson's predictions and present evidence of any alignment or lack of alignment between AI as a

strategic planning process as employed in this study and the predictions. In an effort to answer question four, I used data collected during the strategic planning process as well as the survey and focus group immediately following strategic planning.

"The need for strategic thinking, acting, and learning is only going to increase in the next decade" (Bryson, 2010, p. S260). Bryson (2010) explained that the United States is in the midst of critical issues ranging from war to financial crisis to natural disasters. Facing these crises, public and nonprofit institutions must employ strategic thinking, acting, and learning to guide and inform action. There is evidence that AI has the ability to foster strategic thinking and learning and weaker evidence in regard to action. During the discovery phase, subcommittee members engaged in inquiry about special education in the Will's Mountain School District. The AI interviews offered subcommittee members an opportunity to both individually and collectively learn about special education in the school district. As a result of the interviews, subcommittee members identified common themes. A middle school regular education teacher described how the common themes represented strategic learning. She explained, "There were a lot of common themes that stuck out that it just made you realize, okay, that has to be something (...) [when] we move forward because it's important to everybody that we interviewed."

There is also evidence that subcommittee members engaged in strategic thinking during AI. The dream and design phases offer evidence of strategic thinking. During the dream phase, subcommittee members engaged in discussions about their individual findings from the AI interviews to generate word walls. Subcommittee members used the word walls and individual notes to develop four provocative propositions to guide the

future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District. During the design phase, subcommittee members used their individual notes and word walls to make decisions and identify which actions to employ in an effort to realize the provocative propositions.

The evidence of action is minimal due to the limitations of this study, while the evidence of intentions to act is greater. Chapter three stipulates that this study was intended to examine the strategic planning process and not the implementation of the plan. Consequently, the study's construct makes it difficult to know if AI led to strategic action during the implementation of the plan, since it is beyond the scope of this study. While actual action as evident through the implementation of the plan is beyond the scope of this study, subcommittee members did identify potential actions that they could take individually to realize the plan. During the destiny phase, nine out of ten or 90% of the subcommittee members present during the focus group identified action(s) that they could take to realize the provocative propositions and action plans.

"Approaches or designs for strategic planning will continue to proliferate—although they may be called by other names" (Bryson, 2010, p. S260). Bryson (2010) also suggested that as approaches or designs proliferate, so will the need for evidence of which approaches work best given certain circumstances. To that end, Bryson highlighted the importance of research in strategic planning to help clarify the practice. The alignment between this study and Bryson's prediction underscores one of the fundamental purposes of this study. This study sought to describe AI as a strategic planning process as well as explore participants' experiences and perceptions in an effort to create knowledge about AI as an approach to strategic planning. It is hoped that

researchers and practitioners will read this study about how AI performed as an approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school, and make decisions about its efficacy as an approach to strategic planning in other contexts.

"Pressures for more inclusive approaches will increase, both for intra- and interorganizational change efforts, along with greater knowledge of effective practices for doing so" (Bryson, 2010, p. S261). Bryson (2010) cited several reasons for the increase in pressure for inclusive approaches to strategic planning such as: (a) many problems require systems thinking from multiple organizations, (b) people have divergent levels of expertise, perspectives, and local knowledge, (c) large diverse groups can produce better judgments, coordination, and collaboration than small groups, and (d) coalition building amongst those responsible for adopting and implementing change is required (Bryson, 2010, p. S261). There is evidence of alignment between this study and Bryson's prediction. The study engaged 12 subcommittee members directly and an additional 35 diverse stakeholders through AI interviews. The subcommittee members and additional stakeholders represented varied levels of expertise, perspectives, and local knowledge. For example, subcommittee members and stakeholders consisted of school administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, retired teachers, coaches, support staff, parents, students, employers, and grandparents. A parent of an elementary student with a disability reflected on how AI allowed her to offer her unique perspective. She revealed,

> Like as a parent without having the education or special education degree, you've [referring to other subcommittee members] got to still listen to what I had to say as a parent and I felt that was a positive approach for me. Because I don't usually

like to speak out, but when I did, you guys listened, and it made me feel proud of myself for actually speaking up and saying something.

AI also offered subcommittee members the opportunity to interact and build relationships which are fundamentally important for adopting and implementing strategic plans. In summary, although the school district controlled the overall inclusiveness in this strategic planning process through setting limits on participation, there still exist evidence of an alignment between AI as employed in this study and Bryson's prediction.

"Pressures will increase for the use of methods that integrate analysis and synthesis into strategic planning processes" (Bryson, 2010, p. S261). Bryson (2010) suggested that methods that integrate analysis and synthesis offer a more holistic view of the problem and foster discussions necessary for developing agreement and action. There is evidence for an alignment between AI as employed in this study and Bryson's prediction. During the discovery phase, subcommittee members collected data through AI interviews. While listening to the stories from the AI interviews, subcommittee members individually analyzed the qualitative data, which resulted in individual findings. Next, during the dream phase, subcommittee members collectively re-analyzed the data resulting in word walls which represent the collective findings of the entire subcommittee. Subcommittee members then synthesized both their individual and collective findings into provocative propositions and action steps. There is also evidence that AI fostered dialogue during the analysis and synthesis process. One survey question directly asked about dialogue. The question asked if participants agreed with the statement, "during this process, I engaged in positive dialogue about special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.73 on a five

point scale for agreement. Additionally, a middle school dean of students explained the intricate relationship between subcommittee members' dialogue and the development of the strategic plans. He elucidated,

> I think it was easier to come up with ideas because you could listen to someone and add to it or change it a little bit, so I think it [was] enhanced. We were able to come up with better ideas that way.

The evidence reveals an alignment between AI as employed in this study and Bryson's prediction.

"The changes predicted here sit uneasily with increased expectations of or requirements for, speedy responses to serious challenges" (Bryson, 2010, p. S261).

Bryson (2010) expounded that the need for greater inclusiveness and the need for analysis and synthesis tend to be at odds with the need for speedier responses to challenges. There is evidence that suggests that AI as employed in this study has the capacity to be inclusive and foster analysis and synthesis. AI's capacity to include stakeholders and foster analysis and synthesis was discussed in previous sections. Thus, the question here is AI's ability to meet challenges in a speedy fashion while maintaining a balance between response time and inclusiveness. AI theory suggests that change begins with the first question; therefore AI may be capable of responding quickly to challenges. While evidence collected during this study showed that subcommittee members did find AI questions resulted in unexpected answers, I did not collect any evidence specifically to show if change began with the first questions.

During this study, the Will's Mountain School District chose to employ AI over a period of one month. This was the preference of the school district and not necessarily

representative of AI's ability to respond speedily to challenges. In the case of this strategic planning event, the school district could have shortened the length of the process to two weeks by scheduling the dream, design, and destiny phases over two consecutive days after giving participants a week to complete the AI interviews. Instead, the school district chose to spread the meeting dates apart to accommodate subcommittee members' schedules. The school district supposed that asking subcommittee members to give up two consecutive days may not afford all members the opportunity to attend strategic planning as desired. The school district's attempt to maintain inclusiveness by not scheduling consecutive days of strategic planning underscores the difficult balance between inclusiveness and responding speedily. Therefore, AI could be utilized over a shorter period of time by scheduling AI interviews to last one week, and the dream, design, and destiny phases to last one or two days. Employing AI over a shorter period of time could evoke an uneasy balance between producing a speedy response in the form of a strategic plan to resolve any serious challenges, and maintaining inclusiveness as stakeholders' and subcommittee members' personal and professional schedules should be taken into consideration.

"Greater clarity will develop about what strategies actually work in which circumstances, and why" (Bryson, 2010, p. S261). Bryson (2010) predicted that practice and research in strategic planning will offer strategic planners greater understanding of when and how to apply strategies. Similar to Bryson's previously discussed prediction about the proliferation of approaches and designs, this prediction underscores one of the main purposes of this study. This study, as a descriptive case study, endeavored to provide a record of how AI was employed as an approach to strategic planning in an

effort to provide practitioners and researchers with insight on its performance as an approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school.

"A major category of strategic issues will revolve around strategic alignment" (Bryson, 2010, p. S262). Bryson (2010) suggested that as strategic planning becomes "integrated with other elements of strategic management, major attention will be focused on highlighting and resolving issues of alignment so that (...) patterns are established across mission, policies, budgets, strategies, competencies, actions and results" (p. S262). It is impossible to investigate the alignment between AI as employed in this study and Bryson's prediction as the prediction is beyond the scope of this study. Strategic management and its elements extend beyond the actual strategic planning process into the implementation of the plan. The study's construct limits this study to the strategic planning process and not to the implementation of the strategic plan. Thus, due to the study's construct it is difficult to know if this strategic planning event integrated with strategic management and led to any patterns across mission, policies, budgets, strategies, competencies, actions, and results.

"There will be a heightened emphasis on strategic planning as a way of knowing and learning" (Bryson, 2010, p. S262). Bryson (2010) suggested that learning is a major benefit of strategic planning. Additionally, strategic planning involves a variety of stakeholders with numerous ways of knowing about an organization. To that end, Bryson expounded that strategic planning should foster learning and develop shared meaning by exploring stakeholders' various ways of knowing including storytelling, experiences, and physical objects. There is evidence that AI, as employed in this study, facilitated learning and knowing. During the discovery phase, subcommittee members

engaged in inquiry about special education in the Will's Mountain School District. This inquiry occurred through AI interviews of both the 12 subcommittee members and 35 additional stakeholders. The AI interviews allowed subcommittee members to collect data about stakeholders' experiences, values, and wishes for special education in the school district. The interview findings in the description of the strategic planning process using AI section of this chapter, serve as evidence of subcommittee members' learning through stories and experiences during this strategic planning process. The AI interview findings also provide evidence of subcommittee members learning about the functions, values of, and wishes for special education in the school district. Survey question four also serves as evidence that subcommittee members learned about the value of special education. The question asked participants if they agreed with the statement, "during this process, I identified the value of special education in the Will's Mountain School District." The mean for this question was 4.82 with nine subcommittee members strongly agreeing and two agreeing. AI, as employed in this study, fostered learning through inquiry during the AI interviews.

The constructionist principle of AI was previously examined in this chapter as part of research question three. This principle establishes the philosophical foundation undergirding the importance of human knowledge in AI. This study found that subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions mirrored the constructionist principle of AI. Subcommittee members developed shared meaning through dialogue and listening to other subcommittee members tell stories about past experiences with special education in the Will's Mountain School District. Subcommittee members collectively discussed their individual findings from the AI interviews in an effort to

develop agreement around word walls, representing the collective learning and knowledge of the subcommittee members. Next, subcommittee members translated their collective learning into provocative propositions for the future of special education in the school district. AI fostered learning through inquiry into subcommittee members' and stakeholders' experiences, and offered a forum for subcommittee members to discuss their individual and collective realities and form agreements on the path forward for special education in the school district.

Summary

Chapter four endeavored to answer four research questions exploring AI as an approach to strategic planning. The description of the strategic planning using AI provides a description of the actual strategic planning process as it occurred in the Will's Mountain School District. Research question one described how strategic plans emerged from the four phases of AI as employed by the public school to develop strategic plans. During the discovery phase, subcommittee members engaged in organizational learning and individual analysis during the AI interviews. During the dream phase, AI offered subcommittee members the space and time to discuss and collectively analyze their individual findings in an effort to create a new vision and mission for special education in the school district. During the design phase, subcommittee members thought strategically about ways to realize their newly imagined vision and mission. The destiny phase offered subcommittee members the opportunity to make public commitments to action, which began the transition between developing and implementing the new strategic plan.

The second research question explored subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions. Generally, subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions of AI were positive with subcommittee members noting AI's ability to foster collaboration through dialogue and its unique positive focus. Subcommittee members also found the AI process to be logical and inclusive.

Research question three examined how closely participants' experiences and perceptions mirrored the philosophical principles of AI. Subcommittee members' experiences and perceptions mirrored four out of five philosophical principles. Since subcommittee members did not have the freedom to choose their topic of study or lens through which to study the topic, their experiences did not mirror the poetic principle of AI.

Research question four explored the extent to which AI, as employed in this study, aligned with Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning. The study found an alignment between Bryson's predictions and AI as employed in this study. The study actually fulfilled two of Bryson's predictions. The study answered Bryson's call for additional research in strategic planning and realized his prediction that strategic planning approaches or designs will proliferate since AI is a relatively new approach to strategic planning in education. Chapter five will discuss the findings, implications for research, practice, and educational leadership as well as make recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Public schools face enormous multivariate issues such as student performance and its connection to the overall future competiveness of our nation. These concerns generate numerous questions about the value of public education. The opponents and proponents of public education actively propose a variety of solutions to fix the perceived deficiencies of public schools. These solutions vary greatly and include approaches such as adding additional resources, applying research-based interventions, setting standards, closing public schools labeled as failing, and replacing poor performing schools with charter schools. In the midst of all this debate are the thousands, if not millions, of public educators who awake every morning with the calling to help every student achieve their dreams. These same public educators return home every evening to listen to news reports about failing public schools and pundits who question public educators' efforts, values, and motives for serving students. All too often, many public educators who are awash in this sea of negativity begin to lose direction, and even worse, begin to accept the negative descriptions. They allow others to strip them of the very hopes and aspirations which led them to dedicate their professional lives to public education. Facing tremendous pressures to reform education, embattled public educators often propose developing plans for the future as an approach to deal with current weaknesses and recapture public value. In an effort to develop plans for the future, strategic planning is often utilized to help public schools align their vision, mission, and action with the needs of their constituency, which may ultimately increase the value of public schools. This study examined

Appreciative Inquiry as an alternative approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school. Chapter four provided a description of the strategic planning event and addressed four research questions examining the emergence of the plans, participants' experiences and perceptions, participants' experiences relative to the philosophical principles of AI, and the alignment between AI as an approach to strategic planning and Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning. This chapter will discuss the findings from chapter four in an effort to explore their implications for research, practice, educational leaders, and future research.

Discussion of Study's Delimitations

Before discussing the study's findings, it is paramount to begin with a brief discussion of the genesis of many of the study's limitations. As previously stated, action research, particularly completing action research in a researcher's place of employment, proffers some particular hurdles. In the case of this study, the original conceptualization centered exclusively on using AI to complete strategic planning for special education and was not connected to a district-wide strategic planning effort. The idea of using AI district-wide was born from internal politics and led to considerable limitations for this study. The limitations largely fell into two categories. The first category consisted of limitations that arose from internal negotiations about the number of sessions, number and type of participants, and the actual dates of the strategic planning event. Generally, the first category of limitations is expected during action research and serves only to create some boundaries for discussing the findings.

The second category of delimitations holds greater importance for the discussion of the findings. This category was also born from discussions within the district during

the preplanning for the strategic planning event. Once again, the original conceptualization for this study involved only special education and not the entire district. As the district approached strategic planning, there was some confusion about how the entire district would undertake strategic planning. After some discussions about selecting a methodology for the district's strategic planning, it was decided to employ AI district-wide for strategic planning. Initially, I was tempted to broaden my study to examine AI district-wide as well as explore the implementation of the district's strategic plan. This temptation was quickly curtailed during the preplanning sessions, when it became obvious that two camps with very different perspectives on strategic planning emerged. One camp viewed strategic planning with AI as a process for completing the state's required forms. Additionally, this camp did not display an understanding of AI's theory, philosophical principles, and approach. In contrast, the second camp demonstrated that they understood AI's capacity, not only as a process for strategic planning, but also as a practice to initiate change. As a result of my observations, it was necessary to develop limitations that allowed for an examination of AI employed in agreement with its underlying theory, principles, and approach. The chief delimitation created to garner an appropriate examination of AI was limiting the study solely to the strategic planning process as employed by the special education subcommittee rather than the district's preplanning, other subcommittees' approaches, or implementation of the plans. In fact, my observation was confirmed by special education subcommittee members who, during the focus group about their experience and perceptions of AI, noted differences between their experiences and that of their colleagues who served on other subcommittees.

Discussion of Findings: Process versus Practice

The discussion of the study's delimitations, specifically the second category, revealed the emergence of two camps. One camp viewed AI limitedly as a process for developing strategic plans. The second camp considered AI a practice with an ability to extend beyond the strategic planning event. The emergence of the two camps has important implications for my discussion of the findings. I will discuss whether AI should simply be viewed as a process for strategic planning or does it extend beyond strategic planning into a practice capable of creating a culture necessary for facilitating change.

As a descriptive case study, this study endeavored to provide the reader with a description of the strategic planning event and results grounded in actual subcommittee members' quotes so that the reader can make decisions about AI as an approach to strategic planning. While there are undoubtedly countless ways to interpret the study's findings, it seems necessary to discuss whether the study's findings should be viewed narrowly as a process or broader as a practice. The study's delimitations and purpose may lead a reader to solely view the findings as evidence of AI as a process for strategic planning for special education in a public school. While this view is solidly grounded, it may confine the findings to an overly narrow interpretation. In fact, Bryson (2010) suggested that strategic planning as a whole should be viewed as a practice rather than be limited to a process for developing plans. He elucidated that viewing strategic planning as a practice extends it beyond the development of plans into the creation of behaviors that allow for the implementation of plans and the realization of the organization's vision and mission. I would argue that strategic planning as a practice is actually about creating

a culture with the capacity to realize the plans, vision, and mission. Therefore, I would urge the reader to consider the study's findings relative to practice rather than limited to characteristics of a process.

A summary of the study's chief results showed that AI: (a) produced organizational learning, (b) fostered individual and collective analysis, (c) offered the time and space for subcommittee members to engage in positive dialogue, (d) promoted strategic thinking, (e) facilitated the creation of a collectively imagined vision and mission, (f) increased subcommittee members' commitment, (g) encouraged collaboration through positive dialogue and a unique positive focus, and (h) offered a logical and inclusive process to develop plans for the future. Chapter two presented a variety of studies about AI in education, which also produced similar results. For example, Dickerson and Helm-Stevens (2011) also found that AI offered participants the relational space, time, and purpose to collaborate when the Vancouver School District utilized AI to build a collaborative culture. Also, Price, Scully, and Willoughby (2007) and Willoughby and Tosey (2007) revealed that AI produced data about the school featured in their study in a similar manner as this study produced organizational learning about special education in the Will's Mountain School District. While this study's results extended the evidence of AI as a process for planning, they might also suggest important implications of AI as a practice beyond the actual planning event.

I assert that many of the study's results underscore how AI as a practice may have the potential to not only produce strategic plans, but also facilitate the development of conditions necessary to create a culture capable of producing change. For example, in this study I found that subcommittee members engaged in organizational learning and

created new knowledge and understandings as they individually and collectively analyzed their AI interviews. Fullan (2001) also identified the importance of knowledge creation and sharing to create a culture of change. I suggest that this study of AI and its findings revealed that AI has the ability to create conditions necessary for creating a culture of change. For example, I surmise that positive dialogues, inclusiveness, and increasing the commitment of an organization's members are imperative practices to creating a culture of change and, therefore, the study's findings should not be limited solely to the process of developing plans. Thus, I believe this study's findings reveal not only how AI performed as an approach to creating strategic plans, but also AI's capacity as a practice.

Implications for the Practice of Strategic Planning

While the study's findings may offer numerous insights into the practice of strategic planning using AI, there were several findings that I believe provided unique perspectives into the practice. Those findings centered on AI's ability to align with Bryson's (2010) prediction for the future of strategic planning. To this end, I will discuss how this study offers concrete examples that begin to bridge the gap between strategic planning theory and praxis. Moreover, I will discuss AI's unique ability to integrate analysis and synthesis into strategic planning. Additionally, I will explore important aspects of participants' experiences relative to the poetic principle of AI and why it is important to involve participants early in the process as well as develop a solid foundation of knowledge about AI amongst participants before employing it as an approach to strategic planning.

Research question four, examined the extent to which AI aligned with the Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning. In general, in this study I

found that AI, as employed in this district, aligned closely with Bryson's predictions. These findings may have implications for the practice of strategic planning, since it moves the conversation beyond predictions and/or theories and offers actual exemplars of how to create some of the conditions that strategic planners opine are necessary to benefit from strategic planning. Strategic planners often theorize that strategic learning, thinking, and acting are imperative to successfully realizing strategic plans, but rarely offer examples of how to produce them. To this end, this study provided concrete techniques to engage participants in strategic learning and thinking. For example, during this study, subcommittee members engaged in AI interviews followed by focus groups where participants shared their findings. These activities offered subcommittee members an opportunity to learn about special education in the school district. Next, subcommittee members engaged in strategic thinking when they developed word walls identifying key findings from the AI interviews and created provocative propositions and action steps for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District. Moreover, the examples offered in this study are not limited to strategic thinking and learning but demonstrate many other techniques that allow theory to move beyond the abstract and into actual application. Strategic planners often indicate that strategic planning should be inclusive. The study revealed that AI involved a variety of stakeholders during the AI interviews. Additionally, subcommittee members expounded that AI as employed during this study was inclusive because it provided them with the space and time to arrive at their own findings and authentically develop strategic plans for the future of special education in the school district. Thus, this study's concrete examples, in combination

with supporting evidence, may have important implications for the practice of strategic planning, because it offers the reader a bridge between theory and practice.

Also connected to research question four, Bryson (2010) made predictions that "pressures will increase for the use of methods that integrate analysis and synthesis into the strategic planning processes" (p. 261). I believe that this study's findings relative to this prediction may pose some substantial implications for practice. Strategic planning usually involves some form of data analysis where participants examine data and attempt to draw conclusions about an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. During such exercises, participants are often asked to look at a data set and draw some insights that may be important to the development of the strategic plan. I conjecture that often participants question the completeness of the data. Who chose the data and why? Are there other data sets that may provide different findings? Is the organization leading us to a predetermined conclusion? Also, all too often these data are number representations such as graphs and charts quantitatively describing some important function of the organization. While I understand that numbers may tell a particular kind of story, in my opinion, there are stories that cannot be told accurately through numeric representations but require other approaches to data collection and analysis. Additionally, I submit that there might be some value in allowing participants to collect their own data from sources of their choosing and then analyze the data in such a way that makes sense to them personally and collectively. I suggest that this study gave credence to an approach to data collection, analysis, and synthesis that allowed participants to develop a level of comfort that the data presented a true picture of the organization and that their individual and collective analysis was encouraged and

respected. Moreover, the logical progression of AI incorporated analysis and synthesis seamlessly to such an extent that it is possible to observe the continuity of themes throughout the four phases of AI. I assert that this study's findings relative to data collection, analysis, and synthesis hold important implications for practice, not only because the study provides a concrete example of how to integrate analysis and synthesis, but it also outlines an approach that increases participants' inclusion in data selection and collection, which may result in higher levels of authenticity and trust in what the data reveal.

Research question three examining the extent to which participants' experiences using AI mirrored AI's philosophical principles underscored another important implication for practice. I found that participants' experiences mirrored the AI principles in all but one principle. Since participants were not involved in the preplanning, they did not develop questions, choose topics, or select a lens through which to study the topic. Thus, their experience differed from the poetic principle of AI. The implication for practice is twofold. The first implication is that participants should be involved in preplanning and included in the development of questions and the selection of the lens for viewing the study. The second is connected to the first, but is only subtly revealed in this study's findings. I suggest that it is imperative that participants develop an understanding of AI theory, principles, and design before engaging in AI. I recommend that organizations that are considering employing AI undertake at least several months of study, conversations, and readings about AI before employing it and hoping that AI becomes a practice that guides strategic learning, thinking, and acting throughout the organization. I believe this particularly holds true for public schools which may be

bureaucratic and hierarchical. For example, teachers must often seek approval from school administrators for small changes to daily operations and almost always seek approval for larger changes like course changes or purchases. Consequently, teachers who are accustomed to acquiring approval before acting may shy away from making decisions beyond their traditional areas of authority. Thus, the idea that teachers will experience the freedom to take action independently based on the newly imagined provocative propositions and action plans is seductive, but in my opinion, out of sync with reality if teachers do not fully understand AI and believe that they have the freedom to act on the plans for the future.

Implications for Educational Leaders

Educational leaders often initiate change with strategic planning. To that end, this study offers educational leaders a concrete model for strategic planning. This study not only presents educational leaders with an explanation of AI theory, principle, and design, but also provides information about an actual application of AI in a public school supported with findings and hurdles that they may expect to experience if they chose AI for strategic planning. This is important because all too often educational leaders, who generally undertake strategic planning infrequently, are asked to lead strategic planning periodically. Many times educational leaders either employ outside consultants to lead the strategic planning effort, or desperately search for a model to guide them through strategic planning. Thus, educational leaders tasked with strategic planning can look to this study to gain valuable insight into AI and read about it as an approach to strategic planning in a public school.

AI may also offer educational leaders an approach to leading change that transcends the development of strategic plans and begins to create some of the necessary conditions to build a culture of change. AI theory is often applied broadly to organizational development, but in my opinion, may also be applied more specifically to educational leadership. Similarly, Evans, Thornton, and Usinger (2012) opined that AI could offer educational leaders a theory of change upon which they could ground their approach to creating change within schools. I project that many educational leaders spend countless hours in their preparation programs studying leadership theory only to find that they experience difficulty when asked to take action and lead. I opine that educational leaders are often pressed to lead change under demanding timelines and in strenuous situations, therefore, they would benefit greatly from grounding their approach to organizational change in an organizational theory such as AI (Evans et al., 2012).

I call for AI theory to be extended into educational leadership theory. I suggest Appreciative Leadership Theory as a leadership theory that offers educational leaders both a perspective from which to lead but also as an approach to creating the necessary conditions for change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 231). For example, Appreciative Leadership Theory would provide educational leaders with the perspective that all organizations at some level experience success and produce moments of peak performance and that there is value in studying and focusing on those times and events as a source of knowledge about how to produce change throughout the entire organization. Additionally, Appreciative Leadership Theory would help educational leaders learn to value the uniqueness of their contexts and understand the importance of giving them credibility during change. Also educational leaders may develop an understanding of the

importance of framing when asking questions so as not to evoke negative feelings and close ears and minds. In this manner, Appreciative Leadership Theory could leverage AI's theory, principles, and approach into educational leadership.

Appreciative Leadership Theory, combining AI theory and its approaches during the various phases, could also offer educational leaders concrete approaches to leading change that are grounded in theory while also informing practice. In this study I found that AI has the capacity to: (a) produce organizational learning, (b) foster individual and collective analysis, (c) offer the time and space for stakeholders to engage in positive dialogue, (d) promote strategic thinking, (e) facilitate the collective development of an organization's vision and mission, (f) increase stakeholder commitment, (g) encourage collaboration through positive dialogue and a unique positive focus, and (h) offer a logical and inclusive process. Therefore, the emergence of Appreciative Leadership Theory from AI may provide educational leaders with an approach to mine their organizations looking for the best and brightest ideas as potential strategies to produce change. Precise activities like collecting data during AI interviews and individually and collectively analyzing data during the dream and design phases foster inclusiveness and build commitment for potential solutions since teachers and other stakeholders mutually discover and agree upon the path forward. Contrast Appreciative Leadership Theory with faculty meetings to identify problems and purpose solutions, and Appreciative Leadership Theory with its foundation in AI begins to separate itself quickly from many of the uninformed, individualistic approaches employed by well-intentioned educational leaders to facilitate change. Therefore, I recommend Appreciative Leadership Theory to

educational leaders in an effort to help educational leaders develop a perspective from which to make decisions and guide their actions.

Implications for Research

This study has several implications for research. First and foremost, this study's findings sit seamlessly with other studies either examining or employing AI in education. Chapter two presented numerous studies about a variety of educational contexts that employed AI in an effort to create change or explore a research topic. These studies demonstrated AI's ability to create positive dialogue, collaboration, involve many stakeholders, and foster organizational learning. Similarly, I found that employing AI as an approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school resulted in similar findings. By arriving at similar findings as previous studies, this study adds another link in the chain of evidence about AI in education.

This study may have also added to the research on AI by examining AI in two distinct manners. Chapter two revealed very few studies about AI in education, specifically in special education. Moreover, there were very few studies examining AI as an approach to strategic planning in education. This study may have potentially opened new ground by examining AI as an approach to strategic planning for special education in a public school. By employing a case study approach to not only describe the actual strategic planning event, but also to collect data to answer research questions probing AI's underlying theory and its capacity to align with future predictions about strategic planning, I might have provided some insight into the boundary areas between theory and praxis. For example, the constructionist principle of AI forms solid bedrock upon which the foundation of AI is firmly constructed. The principle itself is very theoretical and

may not be obvious when translated into practice. This study might contribute in part to exposing these boundary areas by elucidating the considerable interplay between theory and praxis. Thus, this study may have added to research by not only providing researchers with information on AI as an approach to strategic planning, but also by exposing the boundary areas between theory and praxis in such a manner that researchers may gain insight into what occurs when theory is translated into practice, or when practice fails to accurately invoke fundamental theoretical principles. This interplay between theory and praxis is important for researchers to study because employing AI as an approach to strategic planning blindly, without fully understanding how theory and praxis influence each other, may not produce intended results potentially jeopardizing the effort of public schools to create change through AI.

Additionally, this study endeavored to explicitly examine participants' experiences and perceptions of AI as an approach to strategic planning in a public school. While most studies of AI provide a description of the event and offer findings, very few explicitly examine participants' experiences and perceptions. This study exposed vital information about participants' experiences and perceptions of AI. This information may be important to researchers because it might provide clearer evidence of what participants experience and perceive as they engage in AI. Researchers might garner some important insights that begin to shine light on participants' experiences and perceptions of AI, further clarifying the interaction between participants and AI, and why AI continues, in study after study, to produce very similar results.

Finally, this study answers some of the calls for additional research into strategic planning. These calls ask for specific models for strategic planning, information about

which models work best in certain contexts, and what strategies produce the best results in certain circumstances. This study describes strategic planning for special education in a public school. It provides detailed information about AI's underlying theory, principles, and approach. Additionally, the study offers information about the context and specific strategies employed during the strategic planning event. Moreover, the study revealed key findings about the strategic planning event which may help future researchers to make decisions about its efficacy as a model for strategic planning. I did not endeavor to answer questions about whether or not AI is best in a specific context or that certain strategies work best in certain circumstances. In contrast, I endeavored to provide enough information about the strategic planning event and probe AI's application sufficiently relative to its underlying principles and Bryson's (2010) predictions for the future of strategic planning to allow the reader and/or other researchers to make their own decisions about AI's efficacy as an approach to strategic planning.

Recommendations for Future Research

Chapter two notes that AI is relatively new to education. This study represents one of only a very limited number of studies examining AI as a process for strategic planning in education. With such an incomplete body of research on AI in education, I have numerous recommendations for future research. First, I recommend a research study exploring the preconditions and/or important steps necessary before employing AI. I theorize that there are certain preconditions and/or steps that may either limit or maximize the application of AI in education. For example, I believe that organizations that provide professional development in AI to leaders and stakeholders prior to employing it may find that the process produces greater change than organizations that

simply expose leaders and stakeholders to AI without developing a solid understanding of its theory, principles, and design. The potential methodology for a study exploring preconditions and/or important steps necessary before employing AI may be a comparative case study examining successful implementations of AI and cases where AI floundered. In this study, researchers can investigate the preconditions and/or steps taken prior to implementing AI in an organization that successfully implemented AI and in an organization that did not successfully implement AI. It is hoped that a comparison of the two organizations may reveal some important findings about necessary preconditions and/or important steps taken prior to implementing AI.

I also recommend examining AI as a strategic planning practice both in regards to the development of the plans and their implementation. Most of the extant research on AI in education describes the AI process and its immediate results. I suggest that it is time to complete a longitudinal study of AI as a practice for strategic planning. Such a study could examine the actual implementation of the plans, looking at whether stakeholders take action to realize the provocative propositions, or simply place the plans on a shelf. This proposed study is important because its results may offer long-term evidence about the extent to which organizations implement strategic plans developed using AI.

Similarly, I recommend a longitudinal study exploring how using AI to develop strategic plans affects a public school's culture. This study would be similar to Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran's (2011) study that explored changes in school climate and trust following an application of AI in a public school district. In this study, they administered a survey to teachers 12 months before and 12 months after the AI

intervention. Likewise, I recommend gathering baseline quantitative and qualitative data about a public school's culture before utilizing AI to develop strategic plans. After a period of time, the researcher can collect quantitative and qualitative data looking for any changes in the school's culture. Such a study may offer additional evidence about AI's capacity to change culture in public schools. Moreover, a long-term longitudinal study with a similar methodology, but with additional data collections spread at intervals over several years, may reveal important insights into the durability of AI as an approach to strategic planning. A researcher can explore if AI begins to fade after several years or does AI become ingrained in the culture, enduring as the organization's approach to thinking, learning, and acting.

Finally, I recommend studying educational leaders who employ Appreciative Leadership Theory in public education. Similar to AI in education, there is very limited research on Appreciative Leadership Theory. I believe that Appreciative Leadership Theory requires vigorous research in order to further its development as an educational leadership theory. I suggest qualitative studies examining followers' perceptions of leaders who employ Appreciative Leadership Theory to provide further clarification about the leader's actions, approaches to decision-making, and ability to be effective in a variety of circumstances.

Final Thoughts

Organized, well-intentioned change requires organized, well-intentioned planning. Public schools facing tremendous changes deserve approaches to planning that give credence to their local context and recognize that there already exist strengths and aspirations for the future. AI, as an approach to strategic planning, has the capacity to not

only produce plans for the future, but begin to lay the foundation of a culture necessary for realizing those plans. AI offers public schools a process for learning about examples of excellent performance as well as wishes for the future that already exist within the school's local context. It allows participants to select their own sources of data and individually and collectively analyze the data in an effort to create knowledge specific to the local context. AI promotes strategic thinking through the creation of provocative propositions and actions steps. Participants commit to take actions towards realizing their collectively developed plans for the future. As a whole, AI is a logical and inclusive approach to developing plans to guide public schools attempting to implement change.

In closing, there are examples of excellent performance throughout public education. There are teachers who employ instructional strategies and display a level of commitment that not only promote thinking and growth, but change students' lives. There are administrators who create great educational environments and promote high-levels of efficacy and trust. The plans for the future of public education should be grounded in these examples, as they represent public education at its best. To that end, AI offers public education and its stakeholders an approach to planning for the future that gives the educational community the freedom to discover strengths and wishes, dream about the future, design the path forward, and take control of its destiny.

Appendix A: AI Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about the best experience you have had with special education in the Will's Mountain School District. Who was involved in the experience? What made the experience positive for you?
2. Without being humble, what do you value deeply about yourself as a parent, teacher, or administrator in the Will's Mountain School District?
3. What do you value about special education in the Will's Mountain School District? How has special education in the Will's Mountain School District contributed to your life?
4. What is the most important function of special education in the Will's Mountain School District? How would the Will's Mountain School District be different if special education did not exist?
5. If you had three wishes for special education in the Will's Mountain School District, what would your wishes be?

Appendix B: Focus Group on Simple Commitments Questions

1. Starting tomorrow, what action or actions can you commit to in order to help the school district make the provocative propositions come to life?
2. What can you do over the next year to make the provocative propositions and action plans come to life?
3. Are you committed to communicating the ideas captured in the provocative propositions and action plans to other people? If so, how can you communicate those ideas to others?
4. Has your level of commitment to special education changed, reaffirmed, or decreased during this process? If so, please describe why.

Appendix C: AI Post Survey Template

This template grounds the proposed survey questions in Appreciative Inquiry (AI) theory. The first part of the template offers an analysis of descriptions found in popular AI literature. The analysis elucidates commonalities between the descriptions and serves to divide the survey into three themes commonly found in the AI descriptions. Two additional areas are proposed for inclusion in the survey. The first area is prevalent in AI literature although not explicitly evident in AI descriptions found in popular AI literature. Therefore, this additional area can be grounded in AI literature and serves to capture an important feature of AI. The last area is broad and commonly cited in AI studies through qualitative data. This area focuses on participants' overall perceptions of the process rather than their experiences grounded in AI theory. In the second part of the template, the five proposed areas are discussed in detail with supporting information from AI studies and literature. Following the supporting information, the proposed survey questions and expected participant responses are presented. The template grounds the proposed survey questions in AI theory and demonstrates the validity of the survey questions' to measure fundamental elements of AI theory. The last part of the template offers a brief explanation of the potential utility of the survey.

Analysis of Popular Appreciative Inquiry Descriptions

AI is described in a variety of ways by Appreciative Inquiry researchers and practitioners (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Therefore, exploring the variety of descriptions is useful to understand and unpack the complex interwoven components of

AI and to begin to explain how participants should experience and perceive AI according the AI theory. Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly (2011) describe AI as

> a collaborative and highly participative system wide approach to seeking, identifying and enhancing the 'life-giving forces' that are present when a system is performing optimally in human , economic, and organizational terms. It is a journey during which profound knowledge of a human system at its moment of wonder is uncovered and used to co-construct the best and highest future of that system (p. 22).

Analysis of the description provided by Watkins et al. (2011) reveals an emphasis on collaboration and participation, identifying life-giving forces, and constructing a greater future.

Whitney and Trosten-Bloom set aside an entire chapter in their 2010 book, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry,* to answer the question what is appreciative inquiry? Reviewing the chapter reveals strong similarities to the description proposed by Watkins at el. (2011). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) explain AI is

> The study of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. This approach to personal change and organizational change is based on the assumption that questions and dialogue about strengths, success, values, hopes and dreams are themselves transformational (p. 1).

Analysis of the description provided by Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) reveals an emphasis on identifying life-giving force, and questions and dialogue (collaboration/participation) about strengths, successes, value, hopes and dreams. It should be noted that Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) offer an entire chapter

describing AI in which they advance the ideal of transformational change through AI. Explaining the difference between deficit-based change and positive change, the authors expound AI's ability to produce positive change through a focus on the positive potential of the organization (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). To this point, the authors add one additional area of emphasis; positive change. Positive change is the process of discovering and working from an organization's strengths to realize dreams and build a successful organization (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). In summary, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom's chapter answering the question what is Appreciative Inquiry reviews an emphasis on questions and dialogue (collaboration/participation), positive change (building a successful organization), and identifying life-giving forces such strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams.

Similar to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010), Cooperrider and Whitney set aside an entire chapter in their 2005 book *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change,* to describe AI. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) offer the following definition of AI, "Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative, coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization in economic, ecological, and human terms" (p. 8). In addition to their definition, the authors continue their explanation of AI,

> AI involves the art and practice of asking unconditionally positive questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. Through mass mobilized inquiry, hundreds and even thousands of people can be involved cocreating their collective future (p. 8).

Analysis of the definition and description provided by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) reveals an emphasis on cooperation and involving people (collaboration/participation), cocreating a collective future, and identifying life-giving forces such as the best in people, their organization and the world around them.

After analyzing the descriptions and definitions offered by widely known AI authors, it is possible to capture reoccurring themes. The following chart shows the reoccurring themes and authors:

Collaboration/Participation	Identifying Life-Giving Forces	Imagining a Positive Future/Positive Change
Watkins et al. (2011)	Watkins et al. (2011)	Watkins et al. (2011)
Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010)	Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010)	Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010)
Cooperrider and Whitney (2005)	Cooperrider and Whitney (2005)	Cooperrider and Whitney (2005)

The analysis of the definitions and descriptions offered by popular AI authors may serve as an effective predictor of expected participant experiences and perceptions. Participants may be expected to engage in collaboration/participation, identify life-giving forces success as strengths, successes, values, hopes and dreams and begin to create a positive future.

This template proposes an additional area of importance found continually throughout AI literature and research, which is important to discuss when examining participants' experiences and perceptions. AI literature and research is replete with positivity and the role positive experiences, imagery, and thinking play in AI (Bushe, 2010a; Bushe, 2007; Calabrese, Hester, Friesen & Burkhalter, 2010; Cooperrirder & Avital, 2004; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Elliot, 1999; Finegold, Holland, &

Lingham, 2002; Fitzgerald, Murrell & Newman, 2002; Van Der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran; 2011; Watkins et al, 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Therefore, positivity is a vital theme to understanding AI and should be included with the previously identified themes derived from the analysis of descriptions and definitions. In summary, there are four recurring themes found in AI, which will be the focus on the proposed survey questions measuring participant experiences and perceptions. Those themes are:

1. Collaboration/Participation
2. Identifying Life-Giving Forces
3. Imagining a Positive Future/Positive Change
4. Positivity

In addition to measuring participant experiences and perceptions related to the four themes, the survey will gather important information about participants' overall perception of AI.

Theoretical Base for Survey Questions

Collaboration/participation. AI and social constructionism are linked as evident in the social constructionist principle embedded in AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Finegold et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Creswell (2009) explains individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences; often those meanings are forged in discussions and/or interactions with other people. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) explain that focusing on human interaction as a source of meaning creation is a decisive shift from traditional western thinking where humans "cognito ergo sum to communicamus ergo

sum" meaning I think therefore I am to we communicate therefore we are (p. 50). Moreover, Watkins et al. (2011) explain the social constructionist principle holds that the world is created through social discourse where people come to agreement about the world. Clearly, human interaction is important in AI and often occurs through collaboration and participation in conversations about exceptional present moments and desired positive future images (Coghlan, Preskill & Catsumba, 2003; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Finegold et al., 2002; Fitzgerald, Murrell, & Newman, 2002; Ludema, Whitney, Mohr & Griffin, 2009; Ncube & Wasburn, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011). In AI, collaboration occurs through participation in conversations, therefore in accordance with AI theory, participants should engage in conversations. The following proposed questions will be used to validate collaboration through participation in conversations.

(Q1): During this process, I engaged in positive dialogue about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q2): During this process, I listened to other participants' thoughts about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

Since collaboration and participation are fundamental to the AI process, it is expected that all participants would agree or strongly agree with questions 1 and 2.

Identifying life-giving forces. In AI, conversations are focused on the life-giving forces found within the organization (Calabrese et al., 2010; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Elliott, 1999; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Tschannnen-

Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The poetic principle of AI allows organizations to choose their topic of study (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Finegold et al., 2002; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Watkins et al., 2011). Furthermore, the simultaneity principle holds that change begins with the first question (Ludema et al., 2009) and in AI, the first questions are keenly focused on the life-giving forces of the organization, which in turn directs the organization's energy in a positive direction (Finegold et al., 2002; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Life-giving forces are revealed in conversation about the organization's strengths (Coghlan et al., 2003; Tschannnen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011), positive organizational attributes (Grant & Humphries, 2006), peak performances (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003), what gives life (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004), high point experiences (Calabrese et al., 2010), organizational excellence and exceptional accomplishments (Watkins et al., 2011), and values (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Therefore, in accordance with AI theory participants should focus on the life-giving forces. The following questions will be used to validate that participants focused on life-giving forces.

(Q3): During this process, I focused on the strengths rather than weaknesses of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q4): During this process, I identified the value of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

Since identifying the life-giving forces is fundamental to the AI process, it is expected that all participants would agree or strongly agree with questions 3 and 4.

Imagining a positive future/ positive change. In AI, conversations about life-giving forces begin to create what Bushe & Kassam (2005) refer to as new ground from which new possibilities can grow. The anticipatory principle of AI holds that when people anticipate or imagine a positive future they are likely to align their current actions in such a manner to reach that positive future (Calabrese et al., 2010; Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) explain that AI invites participants, in many cases for the first time, to dream about the future of the organization. Watkins et al. (2011) echo Whitney and Trosten-Bloom explaining that during the dream phase of AI, participants engage in conversations about the organization's potential, and for many, it is their first opportunity to "think great thoughts and create great possibilities for the organization" (p. 87). Therefore, in accordance with AI theory, participants should engage in imagining a positive future of the organization. The following questions will be used to validate that participants engaged in imagining a positive future.

(Q5): During this process, I imagined a positive future for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q6): This process inspired me to think about greater possibilities for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

Since imagining a positive future is fundamental to the AI process, it is expected that all participants would agree or strongly agree with questions 5 and 6.

Positivity. Throughout the AI process, there is considerable emphasis placed on being positive or seeking positivity (Berrisford, 2005; Bushe, 2007; Calabrese et al., 2010; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Elliot, 1999; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Van Der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011). Calabrese et al. (2010) cites AI is connected to humanistic psychology. Lewis (2011) explains that the AI process resonates with the principles and practices of positive psychology. Lewis (2011) explains that AI taps into the mind's ability to connect information and emotions. Similarly, Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran (2011) state "the positive principle holds that the energy and emotions associated with identifying, celebrating, and building on the strengths enable people to transform systems" (p. 423). Other authors (e.g. Finegold et al., 2002; Fitzgerald et al., 2002) indicate the positive principle is important in AI theory as a guiding principle connecting positivity with inspiration and hope. Clearly, emotions play an important role in the AI process. For Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) positivity is particularly important in the AI process as illustrated in their statement, "to be positive is more than a freedom-it is a prescription implicit in the process of Appreciative Inquiry" (p. 281). Therefore, in accordance with AI theory, participants should experience positivity during the AI process. The following questions will be used to validate that participants experienced positivity.

(Q7): This process generated positive feelings about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q8): During this process, I experienced optimism for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

Since positivity is fundamental to the AI process, it is expected that all participants would agree or strongly agree with questions 7 and 8.

Overall participant experiences and perceptions of AI. AI literature and research is dominated by qualitative accounts of participant experiences and perceptions of the AI process (Berrisford, 2005; Calabrese et al., 2010; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Filleul & Rowland, 2006; Watkins et al., 2011, Whitney-Trosten-Bloom, 2010; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007). Bushe & Kassam (2005) expresses concern about AI as an organizational change method with little published research. Moreover, Grant and Humphries (2006) express a "need for evaluation of AI as an action research method" (p. 402). While most studies on AI tend to be qualitative, there are a few quantitative studies on AI (e.g. Bushe, 2010b; Miller, Fitzgerald, Murrell, Preston and Ambekar, 2005; Peelle, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011), but very few studies seeks to gather quantifiable data on participant experiences and perceptions of the AI process. In an effort to collect quantitative information about participants' overall experiences and perceptions of the AI process, the following questions will be posed to participants.

(Q9): My participation in this process increased my commitment to the success of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q10): I believe committee work using this process will generally produce positive outcomes.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q11): I am more likely to volunteer to work in committees using this process.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

According to the findings in an overwhelming majority of AI case studies, it is expected that the participants will answer agreed or strongly agreed to questions 9 through 11.

In summary, the following chart is offered displaying the AI topic with source authors and corresponding survey questions eliciting information pertinent on the AI topic.

AI Topic: Collaboration/Participation
Source Authors: Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsumba, 2003; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Finegold et al., 2002; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Ludema et al., 2009; Ncube & Wasburn, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010.
Questions:
(Q1): During this process, I engaged in positive dialogue about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.
strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
(Q2): During this process, I listened to other participants' thoughts about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.
strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

AI Topic: Identifying Life-Giving Forces
Sources Authors: Calabrese et al., 2010; Cameron et al., 2003; Coghlan et al., 2003; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Elliot, 1999; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010.

Questions:

(Q3): During this process, I focused on the strengths rather than weaknesses of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q4): During this process, I identified the value of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

AI Topic: Imagining a Positive Future/Positive Change

Source Authors: Calabrese et al., 2010; Cooperrider et al., 1995; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010.

Questions:

(Q5): During this process, I imagined a positive future for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q6): This process inspired me to think about greater possibilities for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

AI Topic: Positivity

Sources Authors: Berrisford, 2005; Bushe, 2007; Calabrese et al., 2010; Cooperrider & Avital, 2004; Elliot, 1999; Fitzgerald et al., 2002; Van Der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011.

Questions:

(Q7): This process generated positive feelings about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

(Q8): During this process, I experienced optimism for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

AI Topic: Overall Participant Experience and Perceptions of AI
Source Authors: Berrisford, 2005; Bushe, 2010b; Calabrese et al., 2010; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Filleul & Rowland, 2006; Miller et al., 2005; Peelle, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011; Watkins et al., 2011, Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010; Willoughby & Tosey, 2007
Questions:
(Q9): My participation in this process increased my commitment to the success of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.
strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
(Q10): I believe committee work using this process will generally produce positive outcomes.
strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree
(Q11): I am more likely to volunteer to work in committees using this process.
strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

Conclusion

In closing, the proposed questions will measure AI participants' experiences and perceptions. The survey's value lies in its ability to measure quantitatively what participants experience as they participate in the process relative to AI theory. Also, the survey will measure participants' perceptions of the process, which has been overwhelmingly positive in qualitative AI studies. The quantitative information obtained through the survey and qualitative information obtained through focus groups will help to explain how AI facilitated the creation of a positive future for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

Appendix D: Appreciative Inquiry Post Survey

The following survey is part of a doctorate study for the College of William and Mary. The study will gather information about participants' recent experiences and perceptions as a member of the subcommittee of special education. Your responses will contribute vital information about participants' experiences and perceptions working in committees using Appreciative Inquiry for the purpose of strategic planning. This information will provide insight to school districts considering using Appreciative Inquiry for strategic planning. Your responses will be confidential and no responses will be personally attributed to an individual participant.

Recently, you participated in strategic planning in the Will's Mountain School District as a member of the subcommittee on special education. The subcommittee approached strategic planning using a process called Appreciative Inquiry. The purpose of the survey is to gather information about your experiences and perceptions as a member of the special education subcommittee. This survey has two sections. The first section will gather information about you as a participant. The second section will gather information about your experiences and perceptions as a member of the subcommittee on special education.

Since the following questions are about your experiences and perceptions, there are no correct or incorrect answers. Therefore, please reflect on your recent experience as a member of the subcommittee on special education and respond to the following questions.

Thank you for participating in this short survey.

The purpose of this section of the survey is to obtain demographic information about you as a participant in the strategic planning subcommittee on special education and your level of engagement with the planning process. Please read the following questions and select the answer(s), which best describes you. In some cases, more than one answer will apply. Some questions are best answered with an open-ended response. For those questions please provide a short answer.

Which best describes your attendance at the recent strategic planning subcommittee meetings on special education?

____ I did not attend any of the meetings.
____ I attended one meeting.
____ I attended two meetings.
____ I attended all of the meetings.

Which of the choices below best identifies your relationship with the Will's Mountain School District? Please mark all that apply.

____ Parent
____ School Administrator or Member of the Administrator Bargaining Unit
____ Special Education Teacher
____ Regular Education Teacher
____ Other: please describe _____

Which of the choices below best describes your level of experience working in committees in the past five years?

____ This is the first time I worked in a committee.
____ I work in a committee about once every five years.
____ I work in a committee about once every four years.
____ I work in a committee about once every three years.
____ I work in a committee about once every two years.
____ I work in a committee about once a year.
____ I work in a committee multiple times each year.
____ Other: please describe _____

How often do you lead committees?

____ I never lead committees.
____ I lead a committee about once every five years.
____ I lead a committee about once every four years.
____ I lead a committee about once every three years.
____ I lead a committee about once every two years.
____ I lead a committee about once a year.
____ I lead a committee multiple times each year.
____ Other: please describe _____

Which of the choices below best describes your level of experience working with special education students? Please mark all that apply.

____ Parent of a special education student
____ School Administrator in a building with special education students
____ District-Level Administrator
____ Special Education Teacher
____ Regular Education Teacher with special education students
____ Regular Education Teacher without special education students
____ No experience with special education students
____ Other: please describe _____

How often do you work with special education in the Will's Mountain School District?

____ Daily
____ Weekly
____ Monthly
____ Quarterly
____ Annually
____ Not at all.

Which of the choices below best describes your highest level of education?

____ I did not complete high school
____ High school diploma
____ Associate degree
____ Bachelor degree
____ Master degree
____ Doctorate degree

Was this your first experience with Appreciative Inquiry?

____ Yes
____ No

If you answered no, please describe your previous experience(s) with Appreciative Inquiry.

_____

_____

_____

Was this your first experience with strategic planning?

____ Yes
____ No

If you answered no, please describe your previous experience(s) with strategic planning.

_____

_____

_____

The purpose of this section of the survey is to gather information about your experiences and perceptions as a member of the special education subcommittee. Please read the following questions and reflect on your recent experience participating in the strategic planning subcommittee on special education. After some reflection, please choose the response, which reflects your experiences and/or perceptions.

1. During this process, I engaged in positive dialogue about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

2. During this process, I listened to other participants' thoughts about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

3. During this process, I focused on the strengths rather than weaknesses of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

4. During this process, I identified the value of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

5. During this process, I imagined a positive future for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

6. This process inspired me to think about greater possibilities for special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

7. This process generated positive feelings about special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

8. During this process, I experienced optimism for the future of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

9. My participation in this process increased my commitment to the success of special education in the Will's Mountain School District.

   strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

10. I believe committee work using this process will generally produce positive outcomes.

    strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

11. I am more likely to volunteer to work in committees using this process.

    strongly agree agree neutral disagree strongly disagree

Appendix E: Interview Guide for Post AI Focus Group

Reflecting on the AI process, let's talk about your experiences:

1. Did you find that the AI process provided opportunities to collaborate? If so, can you describe how the AI process created opportunities for collaboration during strategic planning?
2. Did you find that during the AI process you identified the life-giving forces such as value, strengths, positive organizational attributes, and organizational excellence? If so, can you describe how the AI process helped you to identify the life-giving forces of special education in the Will's Mountain School District?
3. During strategic planning, did you imagine a positive future for special education? If so, can you describe how the AI process helped you to imagine a positive future for special education?
4. Did you experience positive feelings and emotions during strategic planning? If so, can you describe how the AI process developed positive feelings and emotions in you?
5. In general, what is your opinion of the AI process as a method for strategic planning?

Appendix F: Guidelines for Conducting AI Interviews

- Choose someone whom you do not know or would like to know better.
- Using the interview guide as your script, interview each other for [times are flexible depending on the situation. Allow as much time as possible.]
- Chose a location where you both feel comfortable.
- When you interview, write down key words/phrases you hear.
- Introduce and ask the questions as they are written.
- If necessary, use the probing questions provided in the interview guide.
- Let the interviewee tell his or her story. Try to refrain from giving yours. You will be next.
- Listen attentively, be curious about the experience, the feelings, and the thoughts.
- Allow for silence. If the other person does not want or cannot answer a question, it is OK.
- Have fun.
- At the end of the two interviews, take some time to talk with your partner about what the interview was like for you (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 172).

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